THE UK'S **BEST SELLING** TATTOO MAGAZINE

Skin Deep

Free Inside
THINK BEFORE YOU INK SPECIAL

THIS MONTH
WE CRANK IT UP WITH OUR COVER MODEL

Amanda West

And go to the ends of the earth (well, the Ukraine) to bring you the guys throwing shapes at the **BONE HOUSE**

Sneak a peek behind the artistic doors of **LIANNE MOULE**

And in an exclusive sideline, we also hooked up with **CHESTER** from **LINKIN PARK**

to talk about their new album and his involvement with **CLUB TATTOO.**
Linkin Park. Read. Weep.

Meanwhile, back at the ranch, **MYKE CHAMBERS** teaches us a thing or two about persistence and the joy of ink that lasts a lifetime.

Then we hooked up with **RASK OPTICON** and talked about his move into tattooing from just about every other art form you can think of. Magical.

Last but not least **DANIEL ACOSTA LEON** shows us around Colombia and his studio. Oh yeah, we do Spanish now too.

YEP - WE'VE GOT IT ALL PLUS A WHOLE BUNCH OF STUFF YOU DIDN'T KNOW YOU NEEDED UNTIL WE PUT IN UNDER YOUR NOSE.

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AUGUST 2012
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The needle has landed

Aga Hairesis

THE SLEEP OF THE DEAD

Somebody just made a passing comment to me that included the late, great Rip Van Winkle – or maybe not so 'late' as I don't believe he actually died in the story. For the benefit of those of you who are a) too young to know better, b) too wishy washy to have picked up on one of the most famous fictional characters of all time or, c) zoo animals held for too long in captivity, Rip is a British-American of Dutch descent who enjoys time by himself in the wilds of the mountains of New York, basically because he's a slacker. When we meet up with Rip, we find that he has taken to wandering the mountains with his dog to escape from his nagging wife. At the risk of some backlash, we can all relate to that, right?

On this particular afternoon, he comes across a man who needs help carrying a barrel of liquor up the mountain (again, something we can all relate to), sneaks a drop or two and falls asleep. Are we sure this is still fiction? This sort of shit happens every day around here.

When he wakes up, he finds that his beard is now a foot long, his dog is nowhere to be seen and his gun is rotted and rusty. There's a bit more to the story than this, but the upshot of the story is that Rip has fallen asleep for 20 years. Interestingly, when he gets back to his village and the confusion is 'figured out', all the other 'hen-pecked husbands' in the village simply wish they could share in his luck and also fall asleep through the 'hardships of war', though I rather suspect some other 'factors' might have been more important there.

> MAN, CAN YOU IMAGINE WHAT CRAZY SHIT WILL BE OUT THERE IN 2032? WILL YOU BE HIDING YOUR 2012 MASTERPIECE UNDER A BIG JUMPER, OR SHOWING THE WORLD THAT PIECE YOU GOT THAT'S STILL LOOKING FINE ALL THOSE YEARS ON?

Whichever way you slice it, this is a great story. One of the best ever. If you happen to be headed for some TV quiz show, it was written by Washington Irving in 1819, oddly enough while he was living in Birmingham (UK, not Alabama). Maybe the wives were rioting for a reason?

This got me to thinking – hypothetically of course – what if a tattooist woke up today, August 2012, after falling asleep for 20 years? What would they find? 20 years ago makes it 1992. Now to me and an unholy truckload of other people, that's not so long ago. I can probably even remember what I was doing if I thought about it. I know I was getting tattooed back then and so were an awful lot of my friends, but none of us could ever have imagined that the choice of art that's available now would ever be available to us now – on skin.

In that 20-year period, there's been a lot of forward thinking folk that have changed the face of the art. I won't name any of them – you know who they are, they're names that people still drop around town today. Those people who changed stuff for the better – they didn't always have better circumstances than any of us to make it that way. Some of them even worked in places were the art was still outlawed, but pushed through it because stuff just needed to be done.

Man, can you imagine what crazy shit will be like out there in 2032? Will you be hiding your 2012 masterpiece under a big jumper, or showing the world that piece you got that's still looking fine all those years on?

Who knows what will happen next. That's the sort of thinking that requires heavy sleeping on, but not for too long. Not unless, well…

Man, that mailbag is gonna be a heavy sonofabitch next month… but it was worth it for the funny story. Wasn't it?

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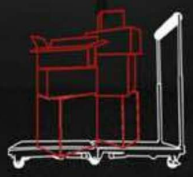

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VIRGINS GUIDE TO YOUR FIRST TATTOO

CHESTER BENINGTON/ CLUB TATTOO

YEP, *THAT* CHESTER BENINGTON. READ IT AND WEEP.

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It's not every day you get to hook up with a rock band of truly gigantic proportions, but today was that day. Chester talks Linkin Park and fills us in on his part in the Club Tattoo story – always a pleasure to play with those guys.

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Well, the guys at Bone House Tattoo speak better English than we speak Ukrainian… just. But nothing was going to stop us publishing this little gem of awesomeness.

28 **AMANDA WEST**
One look at the photo set from Scott Cole's latest shoot convinced us that this would be one of the best covers of the year. When we had closed our mouths, we were then able to speak to her…

60 **MYKE CHAMBERS**
What's not to love about Myke? Quite a lot actually. Talented. Hot girlfriend. All round great guy. Top flight tattoo work… yeah, you could get down on a guy like that. But Myke? Nah!

90 **NIKI NORBERG**
Quietly pounding away at simply being great out in the wilds of Sweden, Niki has a thing or two up his sleeve that more than few would like to get their hands on for sure.

OPTICON

JUST WHEN YOU THINK YOU'VE SEEN IT ALL...

KRAKÓW

WOW – THE INTERNATIONAL SCENE JUST GOT WILD!

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COVER PHOTOGRAPHY: **AMANDA WEST BY SCOTT COLE**

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Sleeve Notes

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ALL SUBMISSIONS TO SLEEVE NOTES GRATEFULLY RECEIVED. BE IT NEWS, AN EVENT, NEW MERCH, A STUDIO MOVE... WE'LL DO OUR VERY BEST TO LET EVERYBODY ELSE KNOW ABOUT IT TOO. EMAIL: **EDITOR@SKINDEEP.CO.UK** OR IF YOU WANT TO BE ARCHAIC ABOUT THE WHOLE AFFAIR: SKIN DEEP, 1 MARCHER COURT, SEALAND ROAD, CHESTER CH1 6BS. BRING IT.

SOURPUSS

Feel a need to brighten up your house with some tattoo-kinda-related paraphernalia? We might have just the thing. We have three sets of these fine hand-painted bathroom items just sitting here in a box – all of which are dangerously close to being swagged up by Sarah for her new house. Fret not – we have them assigned for three readers in another cool, but ever so easy swagerama. Just send an email to *editor@skindeep.co.uk* with the subject line of *sourpussclothing.com* and we'll pull three random entires out of the bathtub. Check in on the Sourpuss site if you happen to be looking to refurb – they've got all kinds of stuff on there ranging from shower curtains to kitchen sets!

DAILY MIRROR ON THE WALL

Bones mailed this in to us last week – an article from Tony Parsons in the Daily Mirror on the state of Britain and its celeb tattooed occupants: *www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/tony-parsons-on-tattoos-they-make-my-skin-906613* – far be it for me to say that writing one decent book in your life and then riding its wave for the rest of your years doesn't make you a writer, but if the cap fits... I'll let you all leave your own abuse on there – there's already enough to sink a ship...

LATE VACANCY

Immortal Ink are looking for a tattooist to join our friendly team in Essex. This is a great opportunity for someone who wants to work in an artistic environment. The successful candidate will be proficient in all aspects of tattooing and have a true passion for the job. A portfolio of tattoos and artwork will be required. If you are interested please contact Jason Butcher at *contact@immortalink.co.uk* or call the studio on 01245 493444.

SHORT SLEEVES

BON VOYAGE!

Arthur T. Sharpe's Tattoo Emporium, (aka Arthur T's) and Dan Lake, would like to take the opportunity to thank Matt Adamson for his devoted service. We wish him the best of luck in his award-winning pastures new. TripleSix are a very lucky bunch.

GUEST SPOT

From September 29 to October 5, Marcin from Tattoo Studio Alien, Poland, will be doing a guest spot at Rock 'n' Roll Tattoo. Also at Rock 'n' Roll Tattoo, new artist Piotr Gie will be firing up the machines at their Dundee branch from September 23.

TRUE INK

True Ink is now open on Poole High Street. As well as a tattoo studio you'll also find a pin-up couture and a tattoo-inspired boutique. Check it out.

SHORT SLEEVES

HELP OUT A BRO...

Some of you may have already heard that Demon (Damian Mills) from TripleSix was in a near fatal car crash a few weeks back that has left him blind. At 25, he had a great career ahead of him that has sadly now been cut all too short. Shining a light in the darkness are Demon's sister and brother-in-law who has set up a surprise charity party to welcome him home – this will be on Friday 24 August at The Stella, Village Lane, Washington, Tyne and Wear, NE37 1BH.

What's this got to do with you if you live miles away? Well, first of all there's an auction where nine tattooists have donated a full day of tattooing – those artists are: **MARCUS MAGUIRE** from CUSTOM INK (Glasgow). **PIXIE** from TRIPLESIX STUDIOS (Sunderland). **DRIS DONNELLY** from ARTIUM INK (Exeter). **JJ JACKSON** from AWAKE -ARISE (York). **CHRIS HARRISON** from BRIDGEEND TATTOO (Bridgend). **MARTIN COULEY** from COULEY'S TATTOO STUDIO (Newcastle). **DUANE ROBINSON** from ILLUMIN-EYE (London). **TIM HINTON** from HOUSE OF MOJO (Truro). **JOE** from INKY JOE'S TATTOO (Suffolk). **MARK POOLE** from HOODOO INK (Stoke On Trent). Which is reason enough, but there's a ton of stuff that's been donated for a raffle too, including artwork and a weekend mystery coach-trip amongst other things. On the night, there are also two bands playing: Blackout Hotel and Public Secret – with a special guest appearance from Dave McPherson (INME) who will play a solo slot on the night.

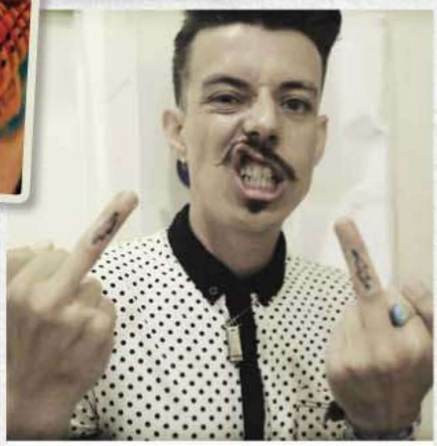
The tickets are on sale at TripleSix Studios, Sunderland, and you can also add Damian 'TripleSix' Mills on Facebook as well as Gemma Marie Mills and ask for tickets at a cost of £3 per ticket. All proceeds go to the RVI Newcastle ITU section.

You know what to do! Even if you can't make it or live in Quebec, just buy a ticket anyway...

RANDOM READER

PHOTO OF THE MONTH

Danny Finekind – uber Tool fan – recently got this fine piece of work embedded into his arm. The image is taken from the inner album artwork of 1996's Grammy Award-winning Aenima by Tool and rendered into skin by Ben Benson. We think that's rather cool - an eye is upon you indeed.



THAT SWEENEY BLOKE

Just a little courteous announcement for our buddy Paul Sweeney (show compere and columnist right here) letting you know that he'll be flaunting himself around the Edinburgh Festival this year throughout the whole of August performing in two mixed bill shows; 'Late Night Laughs' (*www.edfringe.com/whats-on/comedy/late-night-laughs*) and 'Big Value' (*www.edfringe.com/whats-on/comedy/big-value-comedy-show-early*).

So, if you happen to be in town with nothing better to do than have a riot of a good time laughing at a man with a tattooed heart much the same as your own, you know what to do...

THE PUNCTURE HOUSE

Mark Poole, currently of Hoodoo Inc, is pleased to announce he is opening a new studio on July 17 under the banner of 'DERMAL PUNCTURE EMPORIUM'. He will not be working alone (as he has for the past few years) – the old school maestro, Rich Warburton, will be joining him along with the newly introduced and incredibly talented, Dean Kerr.

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Mr Smith Nicholas Hartley

STOOL-PIGEON

You have to love somebody with a little bit of vision these days. Need something to rest your weary ass upon? Try this for size…

Legend has it that somewhere up in the wilds of Leeds (or 'down' in Leeds I guess if you live up at the other end), amongst the thousands of slackers at Leeds College of Art, lies a student doing some incredible work.

And it's true – Nicholas Hartley 'knocked this' beautiful stool together for his final major project for his BA (Hons) in furniture making. Allow me to quote the official line with regards to the piece, which reads thus: "For this piece, I was exploring surrealism for inspiration, allowing ideas to manifest naturally from my sub-conscience without confining myself with limitations of functionality or form, psychoanalysing the resulting designs later to unearth their meaning. This idea demonstrates how a distant memory suffers from entropy of the mind, with its lack of order and predicability, revealing the inevitable decay into degeneration and disorder."

That's the official line – and we get it. It's for your final project and everything. But meanwhile – back in the real world – this stool (which really is called Stool-Pigeon, or *Non Ordinarium Cathedra* to give it its full title) simply rocks like a mother. I want one, you want one, we all want one!

Sadly, much like the Highlander, there can be only one.

SHORT SLEEVES

ART'S INK

If you're in the area, check out the refurb at *www.artsink.co.uk*. Keeping it in the family with Art Lewis & Debs, with their apprentices, Chelsea and Candice. Cool tattooing in Hornchurch.

OUCH TATTOO

OUCH have recently opened another branch over in Coronation Court, Briar Hill in Northampton. You can get in touch on 01604 705459 or catch up with them at *ouchink.co.uk*.

PHAT ROBOT

Phat Robot Tattoo Company (*that has to be one of the best studio names ever. Ed*) is a new studio in Norwich with private parking, disabled access, and a fun, friendly atmosphere. Scootz and Chris-O are the resident tattoo artists who are soon to be joined by an array of international guest artists. There is also a gallery area in the studio featuring original works by the artists and the apprentice, Buggsy. The art of Jake (Peaceful Warrior) Whitbread is also currently exhibited there.

DARK POETRY

After 11 years tattooing, Sween is finally opening his own place, Dark Poetry Custom Tattoo & Arts at 1C Smithy Street, Ramsbottom, Bury, Bl0 9AT – you can also find them at *www.darkpoetrytattoo.com*.

SAKURA IN SHREWSBURY

Sakura Avalon will be guesting at Adorn in Shrewsbury doing hand-poked tattoos from July 18 onwards. *www.facebook.com/Adorn.body.art.gallery* is the link to use – so get in there quick 'n' fast.

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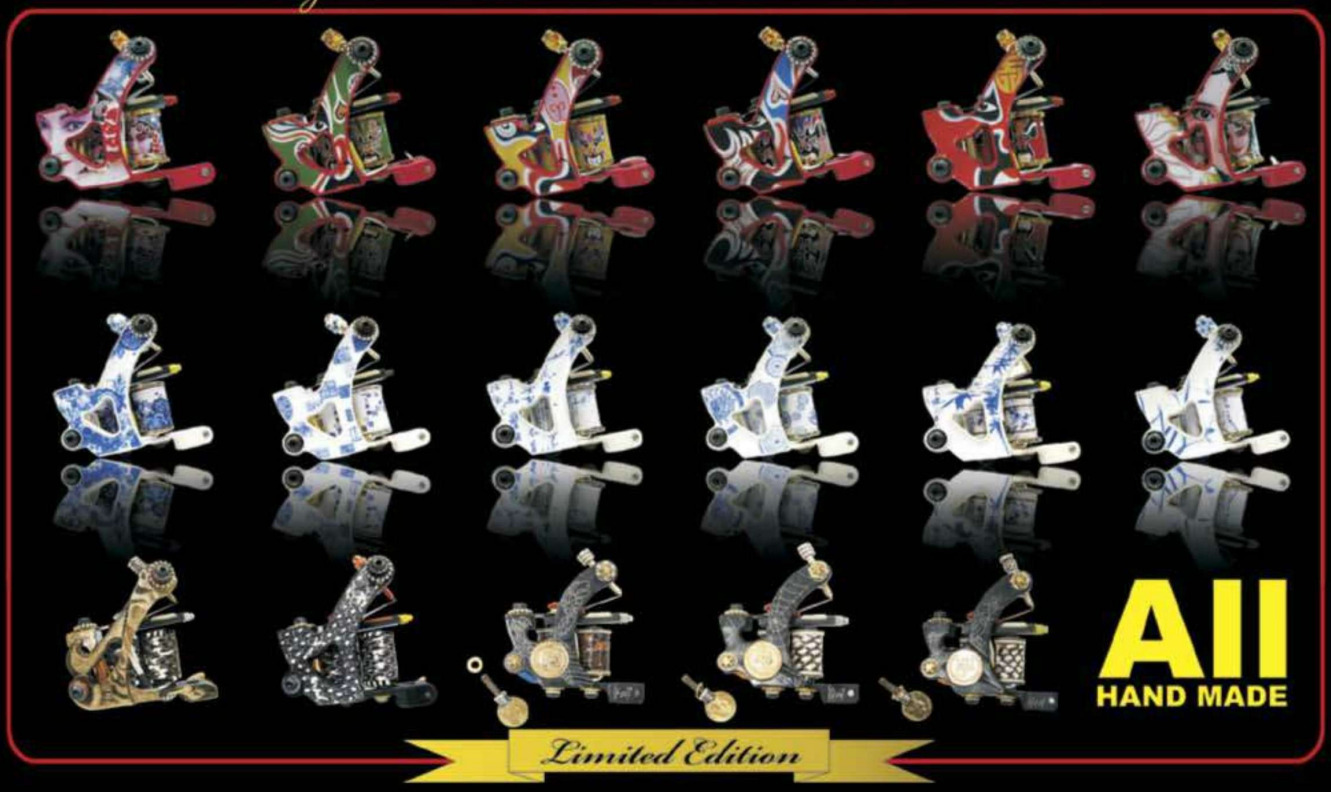

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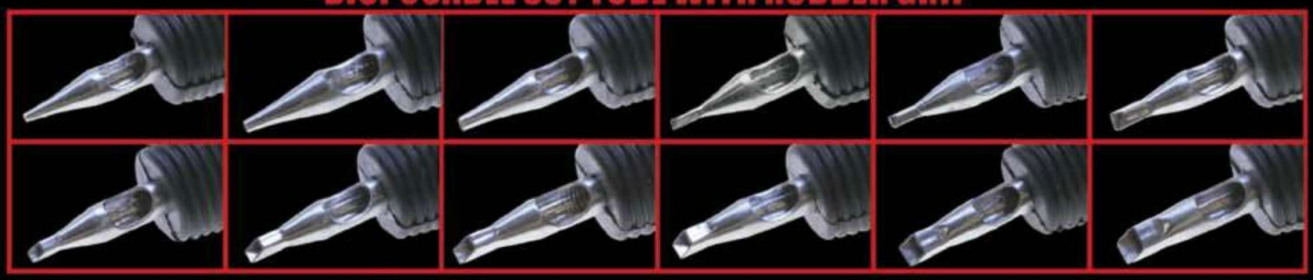

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Conventions
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UK SHOWS

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PORTSMOUTH TATTOO CONVENTION
Portsmouth Guildhall, Portsmouth
www.portsmouthtattooconvention.com

Manchester International TATTOO SHOW

August 4-5
MANCHESTER INTERNATIONAL TATTOO SHOW
Manchester Central Convention Complex, Manchester
www.manchestertattooshow.com

August 12
SOMERSET TAT2 CONVENTION
Bridgwater Sports & Social Club, Bridgwater, Somerset, TA6 4PA
01278 439569

August 18-19
NORWICH BODYART FESTIVAL
St Andrews Hall, Norwich, Norfolk
www.norwichbodyartfestival.co.uk

August 24-26
MAIDEN CITY INK TATTOO CONVENTION
St Columbs Hall, Orchard Street, Derry City, Northern Ireland
Info: Zac at Skin Art Tattoo, *02871 363076*
maidencityink@aol.com

October 12-14
TATTOO JAM
Doncaster Racecourse, Doncaster, South Yorkshire
www.tattoojam.com

October 27-28
HALLOWEEN TATTOO BASH
The Coal Exchange, Cardiff
www.facebook.com/halloweentattoobash

Tattoo FREEZE

January 27 2013
TATTOO FREEZE
Telford International Centre, Telford, Shropshire
www.tattoofreeze.com

SEE ALL INTERNATIONAL SHOWS ON NEXT PAGE

THE BLOGOSPHERE

BAROQUE, ANYBODY?

I came across this like I come across all things around here – those trains of thought can take you anywhere…

For those of you artists, wannabe artists, and… er, well… interested parties, who deal in the human form, here's an unbelievable snapshot of the working life of Roberto Ferri.

It could almost be a story from hundreds of years ago, but Ferri – born in 1978 would you believe – in Taranto, Italy, takes his inspiration from the Baroque painters, and particularly Caravaggio, to turn in these phenomenal pieces of work.

In 1996, he graduated from the Liceo Artistico Lisippo Taranto, a local art school in his hometown. He began to study painting on his own and moved to Rome in 1999 to increase his research on ancient painting, beginning at the end of the 16th century. In 2006, he graduated with honours from the Academy of Fine Arts in Rome.

His work is represented in important private collections in Rome, Milan, London, Paris, New York, Madrid, Barcelona, Miami, San Antonio, Qatar, Dublin, Boston, Malta, and the Castle of Menerbes in Provence. His work has been featured in the controversial Italian pavilion of the Venice Biennale 2011 and has exhibited at Palazzo Cini, Venice, in the Kitsch Biennale 2010.

I don't know about you, but I think this is a level unprecedented in the world today, so it's good to see somebody knocking it so far out of the ballpark

For more jaw-dropping astonishment, check out his site at *robertoferri.net* or his blog at *robertoferripittore.blogspot.co.uk* – hope it rattles your cage as much as it did mine.

All images copyright Roberto Ferri

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Conventions

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INTERNATIONAL

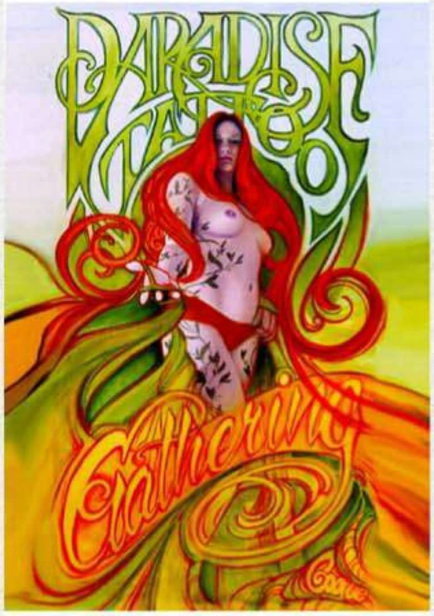
June 15-17
VALENCIA TATTOO CONVENTION
Expo Hotel, Valencia, Spain
www.valenciatattooconvention.com

June 22-24
TRANSILVANIA TATTOO EXPO
Sibiu, Romania
www.tattooexpo.ro

August 3-5
STARFIRE TATTOO WEEKEND
Polysdorf, Austria
www.starfire-tattoo.com

August 31-Sept 2
ROSKILDE VIKING TATTOO EXPO
Rabalderstraede 1, 4000 Roskilde, Denmark
www.inkexpo.dk

September 7-9
CASTELLON TATTOO CONVENTION
Recinto Pergola, Pseo Ribalta, Spain
www.castellontattooconvention.com



September 13-16
PARADISE TATTOO GATHERING
Keystone Resort, Keystone, CO 80435, USA
www.tattoogathering.com
gabe@tattoonow.com

September 14-16
ASSEN TATTOO EXPO
De Bonte Wever, Assen, Netherlands
www.tattooexpo.eu

October 6-7
ST GALLEN INTERNATIONAL TATTOO CONVENTION
Fürstenlandsaal, 9200 Gossau, Switzerland
www.tattoo-convention-sg.ch

PAUL SWEENEY

KEEP ON RUNNING

I'm not entirely sure whether it's possible to have a midlife crisis at 30? And if I am what effect it could potentially have on my longevity? Much to my disbelief, after a lengthily conversation with a close friend I haven't been acquainted with for some time, according to her, it would appear that is precisely what I am going through

I was under the impression that giving up smoking to take up running and getting fit was a positive life choice, but apparently when associated with the rest of my 'things to do in the next ten years' list it makes me a total crisis case.

"RED ALERT! RED ALERT! Attention! All personnel report to the sanity deck, we're under attack from the concept of an irrational desperation to maintain a naive perspective on the aging process. They're throwing Cuban heeled shoes, unbuttoned shirts, leather trousers and Just for Men."

"We can't take much more of this Captain!"

"Activate the nose, ear and knuckle hair. It's our only chance!"

I don't see it myself, after all, I am only 30. Wanting to own a hot rod, do a skydive, pass my motorbike test, ride Route 66 on a Harley, swim with sharks, run a marathon (preferably in the dessert), hold a baby panda dressed as a panda, hold an orang-utan dressed as Clint Eastwood and play at Wembley Stadium (music not football) are all perfectly reasonable aspirations for a young man of my age...

Am I still a young man? Does the fact that I referred to myself as a 'young man' negate any residual youth I may have had left? Hey, I'm still young; I'm not married, I don't have any kids, I live in a loft... I'm the Fonz, with a moustache. Is that weird? When I watched *Happy Days* (the repeats, I'm not that old!) he was always the coolest one, right? Do People still say coolest? Does the fact that I'm questioning what people say put me out of the loop? What is the loop anyway? And why should I give a flying goose waffle whether I'm 'in it' or not? I don't think I've ever been in a loop and I don't intend to add 'being in a loop' to my 'things to do in the next ten years' list, even after this decade is done with.

Pedro Santos, Hell to Pay, Camden

HEY, I'M STILL YOUNG; I'M NOT MARRIED, I DON'T HAVE ANY KIDS, I LIVE IN A LOFT... I'M THE FONZ, WITH A MOUSTACHE. IS THAT WEIRD?

My newest motto is; 'Do what you love... and fuck everything else'. Obviously not a very successful motto if applied to relationships. I don't have a relationship motto... maybe I need one? All suggestions welcome at *twitter.com/pauljsweeney* #skindeepmottos, and who knows, if I like your motto that much I might even get it tattooed!

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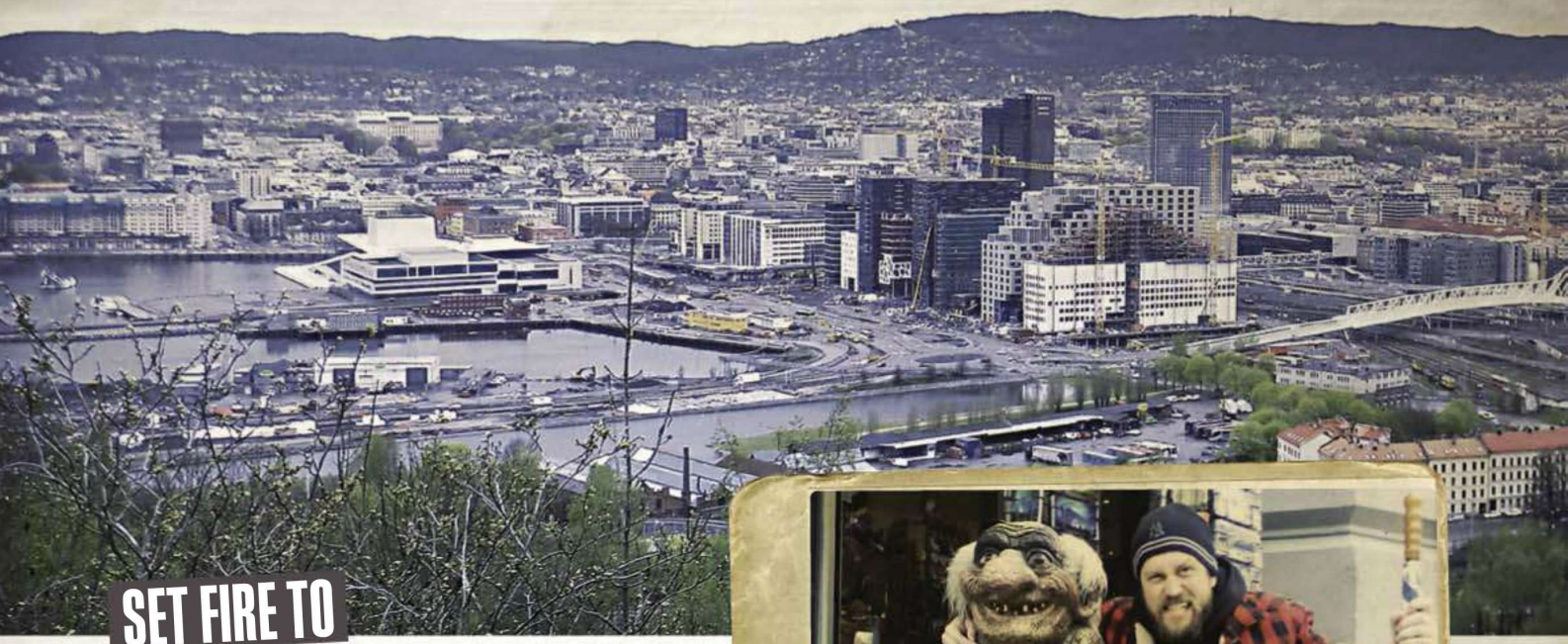
BEHIND CLOSED DOORS

When the tattoo studio doors are closed, you'll find some artists in the pub. Some though, you'll find kicking out the jams in other ways – and as you would rightly imagine, we see one hell of a lot of those 'other ways' here

Maybe this will be an ongoing series. I'd like it to be. In our quest to bring the readership the best tattoos we can find, we sometimes have to leave behind the great work some artists do behind those closed doors. The first step towards rectifying this is simply to sweep your arm across the table and make a space. Job done.

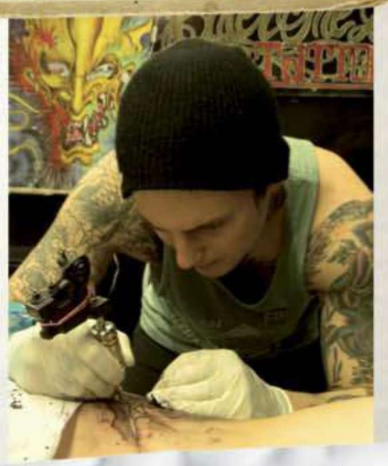
This spread is a little snapshot into what goes on behind closed doors for Lianne Moule (Immortal Ink). Well known across the international scene she may be, but for those not privileged to own a piece of flesh from her, these little pieces of work are no small deal. They're a very big deal indeed.

The city of Oslo.



SET FIRE TO THE RAIN

After a quick stop in London for the Great British Tattoo Show, I set our next destination on the GPS to see a rather daunting '2,000km to destination' flash in front of my eyes… our next stop is Oslo, Norway, and it's a hell of a drive from London!



Tony Linville at the Oslo show.

Unfortunately the weather did nothing to make the distance more pleasurable. Grey clouds and drizzle were our companions as we motored through France, Belgium, Germany, and the Netherlands, and it showed no sign of giving up as we carried on through Denmark. It's a shame, because we drove across the Malmo and Store bridges, which are both huge, spanning some 40km of sea connecting Denmark to Sweden, but with this kind of weather they are not much to look at. As we drive further north the landscape becomes more barren and harsh. There are signs for 'wild moose' as well as rocky terrain, crystal clear river rapids and mountains with pine trees… but no sign of trolls. (*No trolls?! What kind of road trip is this? Ed.*) Finally, after four days of straight driving, we arrive in Oslo to sun breaking through the clouds welcoming us to our final destination.

Maybe I have brought some of 'Murphys Law' from Ireland with me, as sadly, now that the sun is out, we will be sitting indoors at the convention. This year, the 14-year-old convention is being held on the third floor of the Samfunnssalen – a big hall decorated with murals and busts of Norwegian gentlemen on plinths in wooden coves. There is a good selection of artists from all over the world and some friendly faces; Woody from In2u and Stuart from Tattoo Workshop, both working in Brighton, who have also brought John Nott along for the party. There are artists from Germany, Spain and Japan, as well as the USA. Stef from Royal Tattoo in Copenhagen is working opposite me and putting out some great work, and my buddy, Harry Morgan, from Australia is in the booth next to me so there is a great atmosphere.

Despite the good vibe, Friday is a little slow. Apparently it has

Craigy Lee

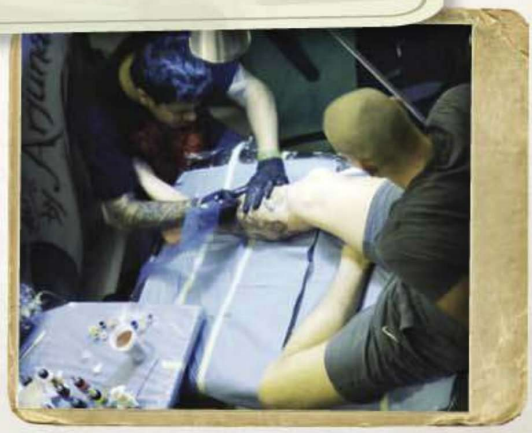
East Flanders Convention.

One of my tattoos from the show.

Dressed for action at East Flanders.

The Malmo bridge.

been raining for three weeks straight, so I guess with the first bit of sunshine everyone wants to get outside and enjoy it. Things pick up over Saturday and Sunday though and I do a few tattoos and meet some nice local people, including the winner of the Norwegian Big Brother who it seems has been spending her winnings on tattoos since the show finished, the latest of which was a tribute to those who died in the Norwegian massacre, which I thought extremely heartfelt. This year, Lene and the organisers at House of Pain Tattoo did an excellent job of organising and helping every artist with all their individual needs, sorting somewhere for us to park our van and putting on some lovely food and drinks on Sunday evening. The show is certainly no newcomer to the scene – probably not as busy as some previous years. The current economic climate and increase in conventions means even long-running shows such as this are seeing a drop in attendance. But Lene and her team have a good formula and are great hosts, so I'm sure next year they will adjust and it will be booming again.

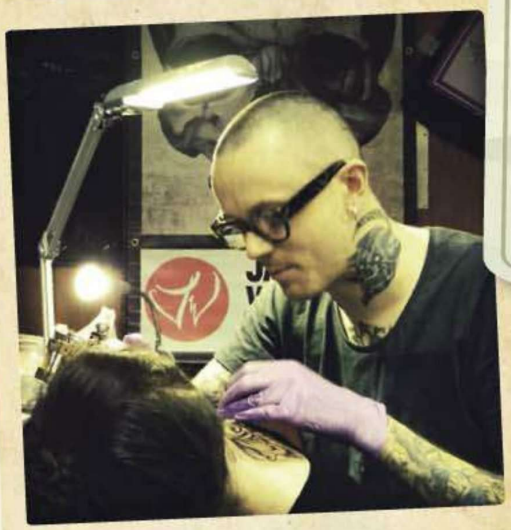


After the show, we spend a couple of days exploring the city which is small enough that you can walk everywhere; we take in the likes of the old fort that overlooks the harbour as well as the ultra modern opera house that is almost like an optical illusion – you can walk from the water to the roof up one huge slope on the side around and down again.

With all the bad weather on the drive up, I really didn't fancy driving all the way back again so I booked an overnight ferry from Sweden to Germany. There is something rather romantic about

Oslo convention in full swing.

The Atomium in Brussels.



Woody from In2u.

booking a cabin and travelling by boat – it's old fashioned and adventurous, or maybe it's all the James Bond films I watched every Bank Holiday as a kid. Anyhow, saving a days drive and being able to sleep and wake up in Germany refreshed is a novelty for sure!

Over the past few months I have driven through Belgium many times whilst travelling to various places – once you depart the Eurotunnel it is a mere 30 minutes before you hit the country's border – yet I haven't stopped here once, not even to get petrol. However, things are about to change as the next stop is the East Flanders convention, situated in the small town of Belare, 40 minutes outside of Brussels.

Now in its seventh year, the convention is a fair size bigger than the last few shows I have worked at. It is held in the Festivalhal, which sits in beautiful surroundings right next to a lake and a nature reserve. The organisers go the distance to make sure everyone feels welcome and have everything they need; then they go that bit further by catering a free meal for all the artists on Sunday morning before the doors open to the public so everyone can sit down together and enjoy some food. It's small things like this that make these events more personal and enjoyable. It was nice to be able to have a quiet half hour to talk without tattoo machines buzzing away or potential customers asking how much the design on their iPhone will cost.

The convention was busy from the moment the doors opened, with around 80 artists from across Europe supplying the eye candy while some great rockabilly bands pleased the ears. After the show, I put my machines away and explored Brussels, which I have to say is lot more impressive and grand than I was expecting. We checked out Market Square (more spectacular than it sounds), headed to the Atomium (it's the thing on the postcards that looks like giant aluminium balls), and finally eat a famous Belgian waffle.

Then it's time to enjoy a few days off before my next stop in Aachen, Germany, where I will be working a guest spot at Bodyscript tattoo...

Oslo Opera House.

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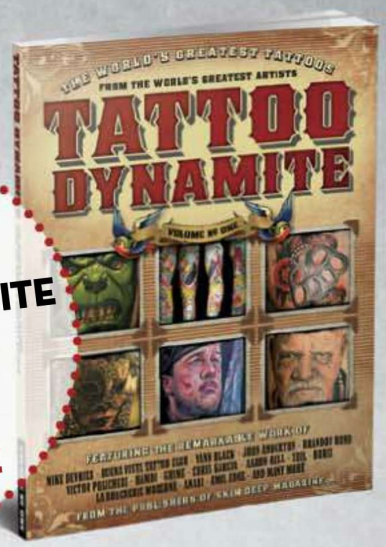

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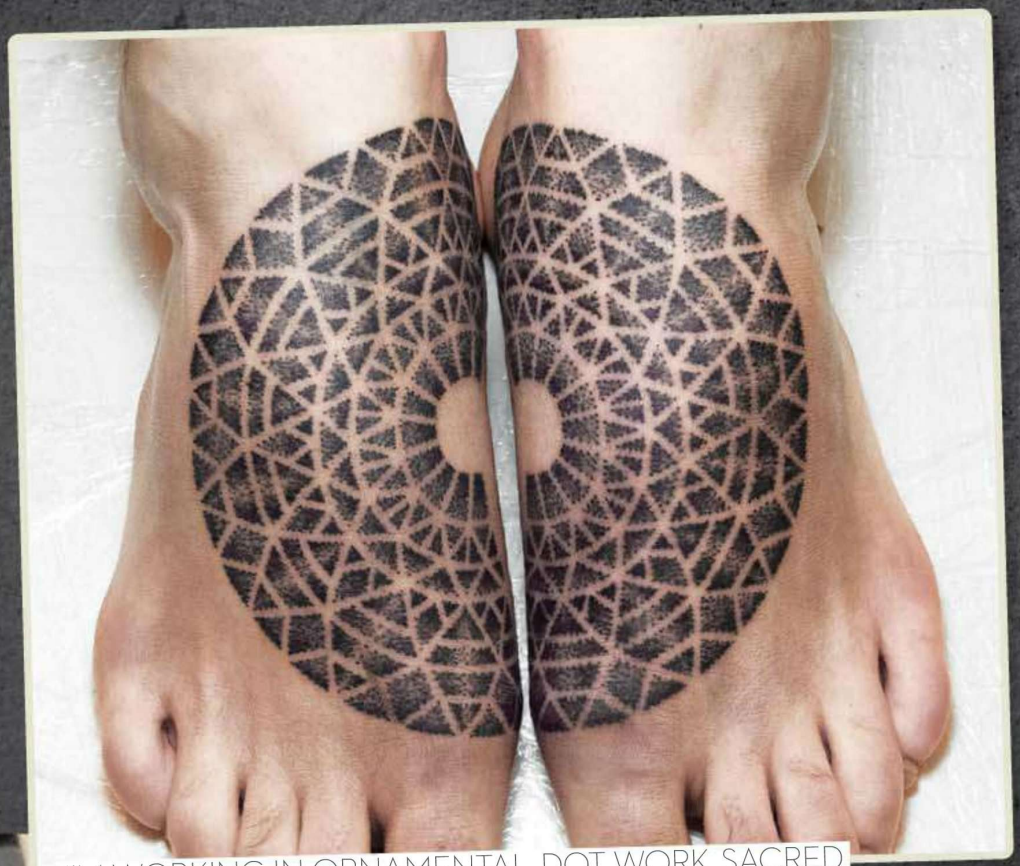
THE BONE HOUSE

Not being ones to let a little language barrier stand in the way of some good art, we set Tom Abbott off on the trail of Ukrainian artists Alex, Ien and Kostya from Bone House to see what he could make of it, Nice work Sir!

It was Ien Levin's black line-work that led me to seek out the artists behind Bone House in the Ukraine. Equal parts mysterious and humourous, Ien, Alex and Kostya are keeping the dark arts alive and well through their unique and varying tattooing talents. Alex even went as far as saying that he's forgotten everything that came before he picked up a tattoo machine, whilst on the other hand, Ien remembers his childhood well but his memories are of staying indoors and drawing, unlike all the other kids. These are driven artists.

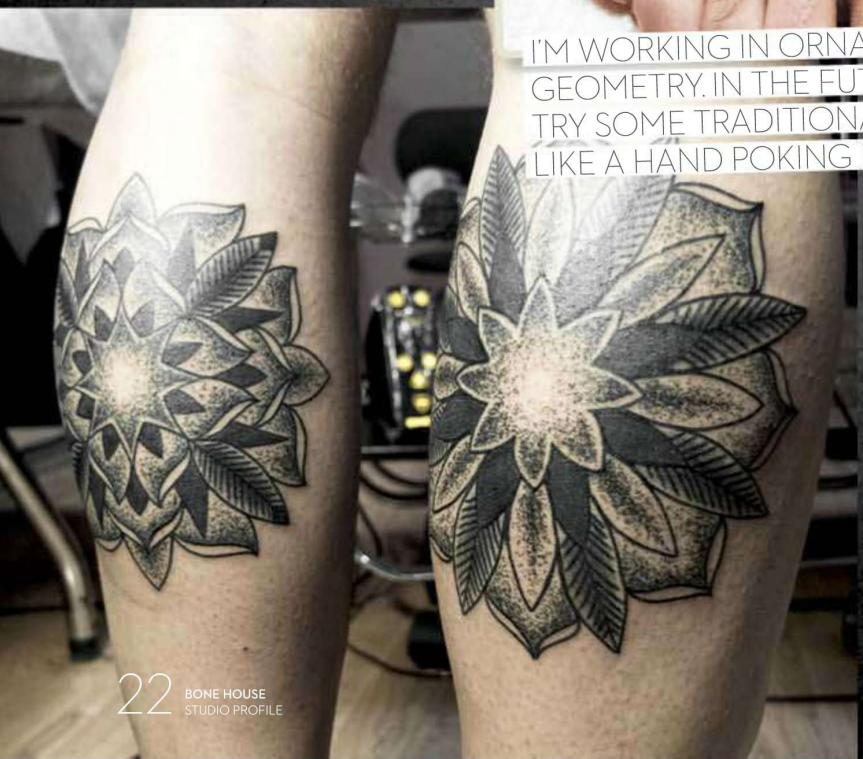
Bone House was founded in 2011 by Ien and Kostya; Alex joined them this year. When I was looking at pictures of the tattoo studio, I couldn't help but be drawn into this idea that perhaps the Ukraine had this whole untapped tattoo culture that I wasn't aware of, so I asked the two of them if the Ukraine was hiding something... "There is no tattoo culture in the Ukraine" they responded in unison. So what is it then that drives their art? The best thing to do is to just look at it... the lines and the dots – geometry at work.

Alex has always been attracted to crafts. "I think that hand-crafted things are the most beautiful; that was what made



Tom Abbott © Bone House

I'M WORKING IN ORNAMENTAL, DOT WORK, SACRED GEOMETRY. IN THE FUTURE I WANT TO TRY SOME TRADITIONAL TATTOO TECHNIQUES LIKE A HAND POKING METHOD IEN

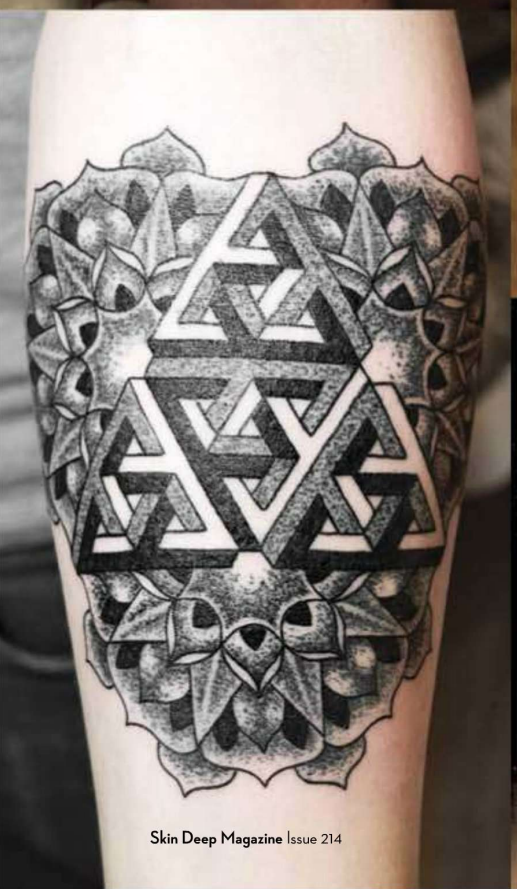


DOWN WITH THE KIDS

During the research of this, I wondered why it's referred to as The Ukraine and not simply Ukraine. Here's what the good old internet had to offer:

It goes back to soviet times were the soviets wanted Ukraine to be looked on as some geographical area of Russia . Like we say in Britain, The Cotswolds or The North Ridings. So when the Beeb would interview a Russian Diplomat for instance, he would say The Ukraine and the Beeb correspondents would parrot it evermore.

ALEX TATTOOS



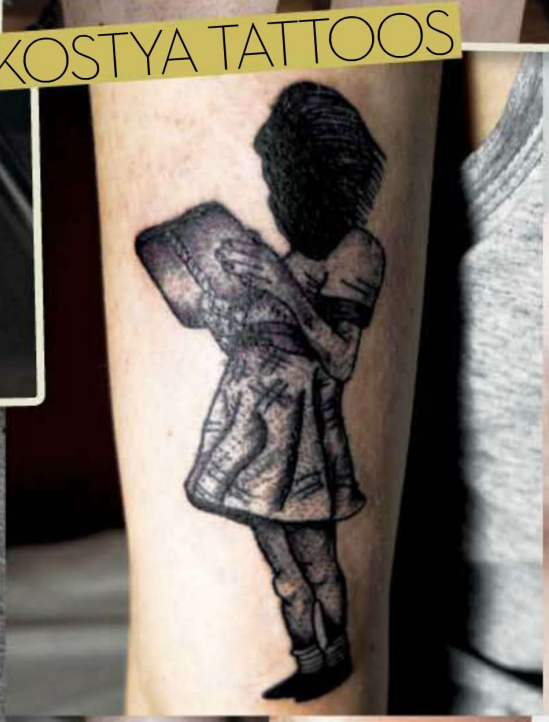
> ONE DAY I JUST ASKED MYSELF "WHY NOT?" AND GOT MY FIRST TATTOO IEN

me decide to start tattooing." And whilst Ien was visiting his friend's studio (Bright Ink) to celebrate the anniversary of his shop, he met Alex who was working there at the time. They drank a bottle of cognac together and became fast friends, realising they had a similar vision, leading to Alex joining Ien at Bone House.

I asked them both to describe their individual styles. "I'm working in ornamental, dot

IEN TATTOOS

KOSTYA TATTOOS



THERE'S NO TATTOO CULTURE IN UKRAINE

ALEX

work, sacred geometry and black and grey. In the future I want to try some traditional tattoo techniques like a hand-poking method," Alex responded. And Ien: "It's a mixture of natural themes, sacred geometry, dot work, engravings, etc. I use only black ink." Those final words of Ien's hit the core of what they're really doing. They're bringing the most natural and age-old of colours to the forefront of their tattooing, and doing wonderful things with it. "Bring back more black!" Alex concludes… and as I continue looking at their work, I couldn't help but nod along with this statement.

Their views on how tattooing has changed and is perceived in the 21st century, is thatit is something that is continually evolving and cannot be defined. And as I finish my short but intriguing interview with Alex and Ien, I can't help but start to plan making my way back Bone House to get tattooed by the two of them, continuing and evolving my own personal journey into black ink.

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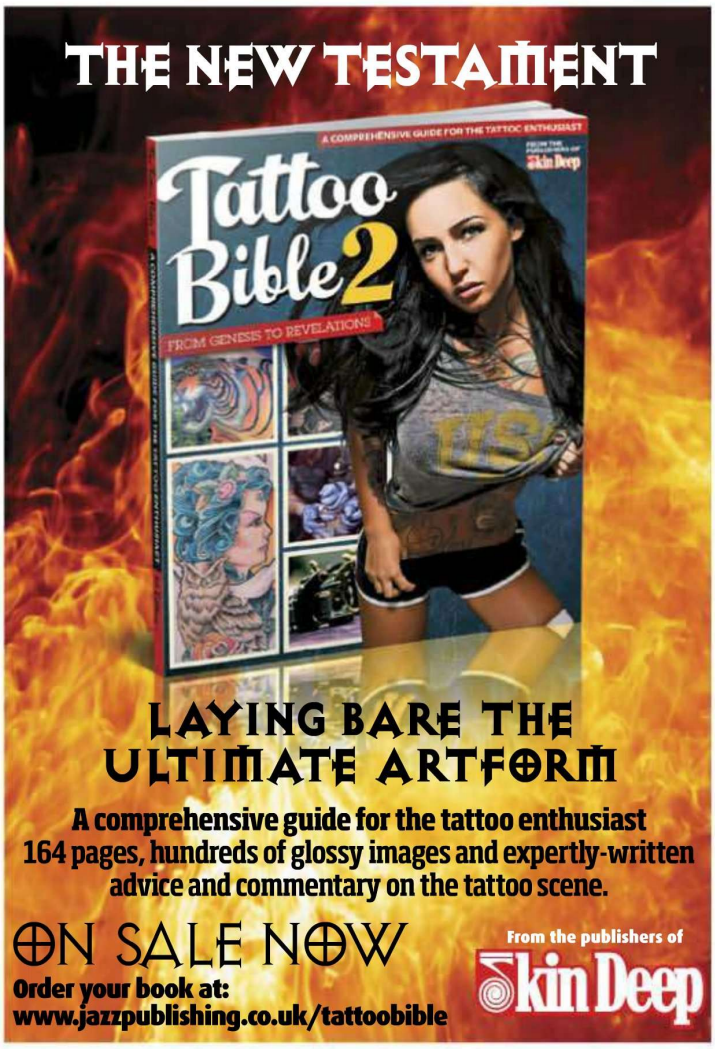
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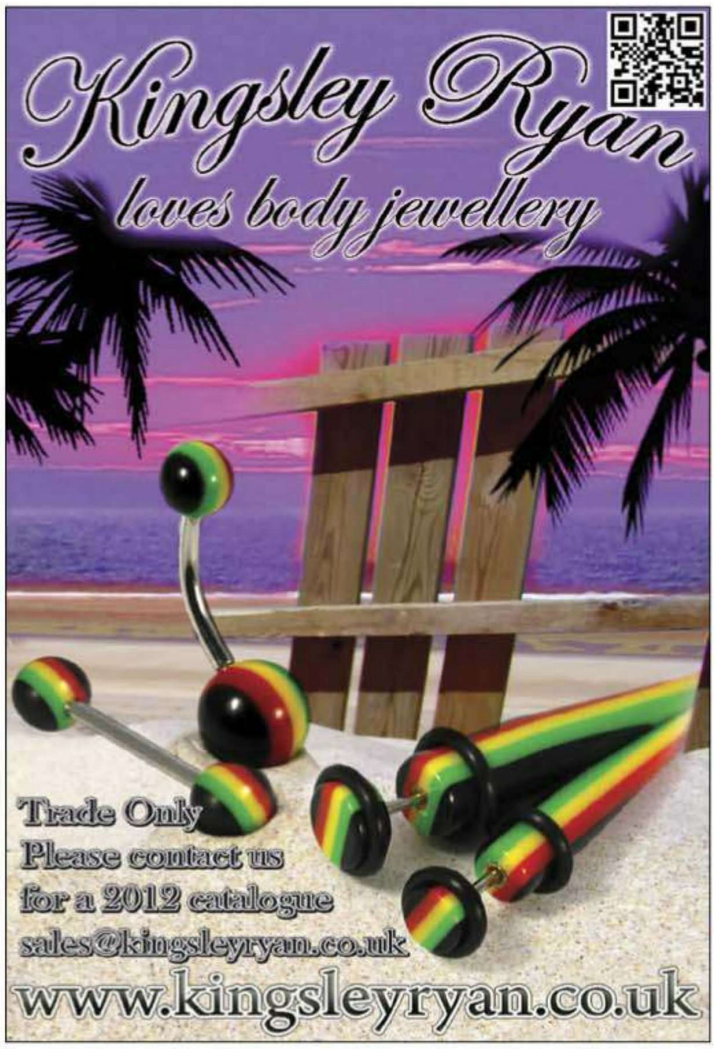
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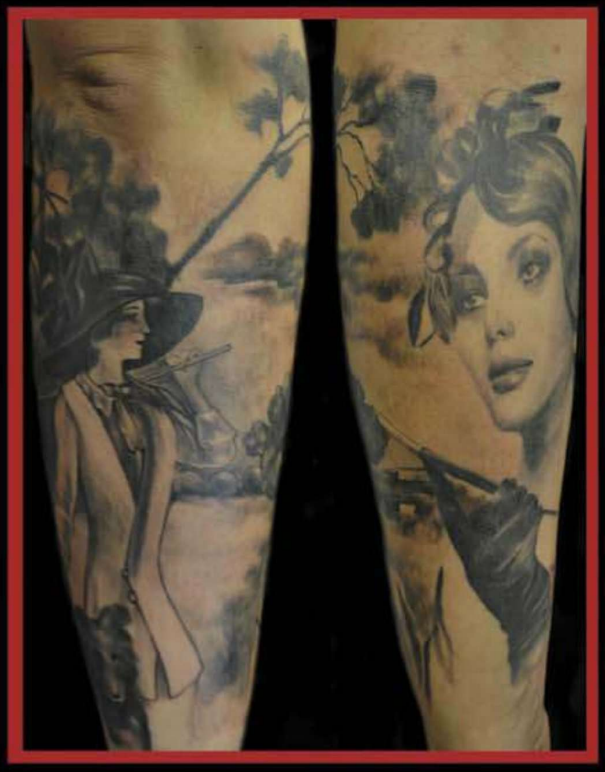

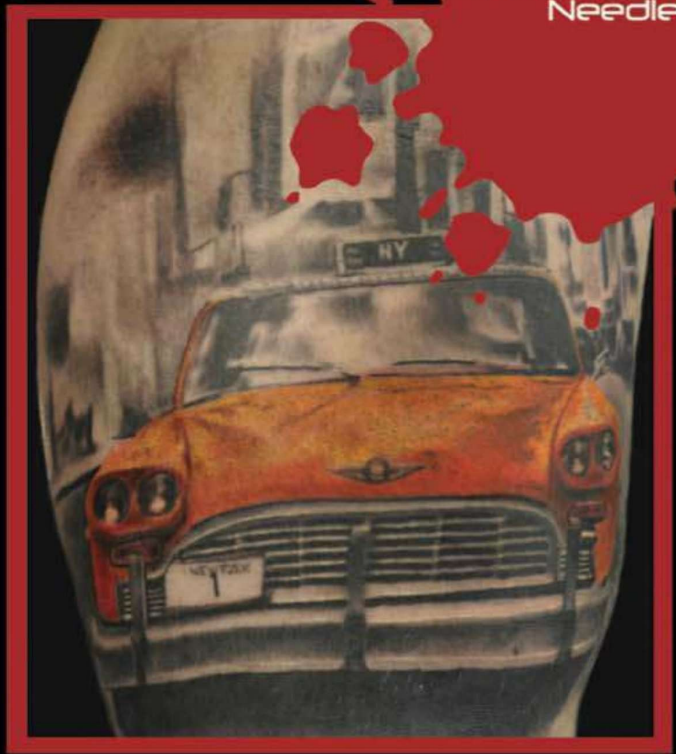

wickedneedles.com Southampton, UK

the cover model

When Mr Cole flaunted these pics in front of us, there was very little we could say apart from "they're ours". With that side figured out and one of the best covers in a long time under the belt, we went drilling for oil inside the head of Amanda West

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alzone666@hotmail.com

In an ever transient world, working in the same place for more than ten years seems like a commitment more serious than marriage to me. If I've gotten my math correct, Amanda has spent the majority of her career at Alzone. From where I'm standing, a lot has changed in just the last few short years and I wonder how she sees it.

"Yep – I've been at the Alzone, on Eastgate Street in Gloucester, since 2001, but I've been part of Alzone since the beginning of the official business in 1997. I love the shop with a passion and couldn't imagine being anywhere else. I adore the privilege of working with some of my best friends every day: Al Hale, who owns the shop (and has been working hard in tattooing for 15 years); Lee Mallett, who's been with us as a piercer and now as a tattoo artist for a long time; Nick Cook, who was our receptionist – he learned tattooing in Spain and came back to us six years into his career; Bryony, who was the apprentice but is producing beautiful, neo traditional tattoos with great precision; and I mustn't forget Jim, one of my best friends and our shop manager – he's been with us for around seven years and is the axis of the shop. He's a brilliant bloke, a computer wizard, does jobs without being hassled to, and also books appointments sometimes. The shop truly is a joy to be in – which is crass and inappropriate of course, but true all the same! Having fun is important to us all in the shop and we definitely do.

Mr Smith Mr Cole

"I started my apprenticeship in 1997, and around a year later began steadily tattooing easy things, which, to be fair, was very easy in the '90s. Since I started tattooing, I always wanted to be designing things for clients, but back then most people just wanted flash off the wall. Also, pre-made needles didn't exist so had to be made up by hand. I was delighted about pre-made

> I ALWAYS WANTED TO BE DESIGNING THINGS FOR CLIENTS, BUT BACK THEN MOST PEOPLE JUST WANTED FLASH OFF THE WALL

PEARL JAM ADDICTION

The day before we ran up this interview, we had a schedule clash as Amanda was on her way out to see Pearl Jam – the day after I was curious (or jealous perhaps) as to what she made of it. I haven't seen Pearl Jam for years.

"I adore Eddie Vedder's voice. It's manly but beautiful and the songs are so well written. So many of their tracks have good memories for me, or relevance to mine and many people's lives. I guess I just grew up, enjoying their music among other bands of that era and to get to see them in the UK was the opportunity of a lifetime. I haven't really wanted to go to a gig for a long time. I've been immersed in work. I'd really like to see Primus and I'm a total idiot, for not having seen the Foo Fighters yet. Alice in Chains and Faith No More are also on the to do list, but kids and tattooing are my priority right now. The Pearl Jam gig in Manchester was absolutely perfect though..."

needles because as the demand for more custom work was rising, it made it easier to have the time to draw. Also, hand-drawn stencils… my God I'm glad of the thermal copier. Some stencils would take longer to draw than to tattoo! You couldn't buy from any suppliers without a registration certificate, and going into a trade only room at a show was terrifying as someone new to the business.

"Now though, anyone can get hold of anything, which is kind of a shame. I think public knowledge is important, but the mystique of tattooing has been lost by tattoo TV programmes, and the dawn of everyone knowing a kitchen wizard has arrived. Some balance would be nice. It's gone from not enough public awareness to everyone 'having a go' irresponsibly. Not to mention not paying tax on their earnings.

> I'LL JUST BE THE BEST AMANDA I CAN BE AND AS LONG AS I'M DOING THAT, WITH THE RESULT OF HAPPY CLIENTS, I AM SATISFIED

Don't be surprised, if I do a little roofing or cosmetic procedures in the future, with MY stuff off eBay!

"That said though, some good has come of it because clients are way more adventurous with what they want done than they used to be. This is great because everything is custom drawn now which has played into my exact wishes for my career since the beginning. Inks are better and there's a massive range available. Life is made a whole lot easier for artists to do what they want with extensive needle configurations and different machines.

"I've also had two children, which has made my time management incredible because I have less of it. I work harder than I ever did before on communicating with clients and on my design work. To be honest, sometimes I'm a borderline workaholic.

"I do miss textiles a great deal, but I get to wear stupid clothes, make costumes for my kids, tattoo people, do face painting for

the school and playgroup, bake ridiculous cakes, and other creative things – so I really do feel like I have fulfilled my need to be creative. I'm really lucky in that respect. I'm honestly just so happy to be able to make a living out of something I enjoy doing so much."

Looking at some of Amanda's work here, there's more than a fair few great portraits – that will be the old word of mouth doing its thing. Are they something she had to work hard on or did she find she had a natural talent for it? There are truly some awful examples out in the world, so it's nice to see somebody who knows what they're doing.

"My portraits are OK. I'm happy with them, if my clients are! I work hard on every single tattoo I do. I could never specialise in one thing, as I enjoy doing many things. The only constant in my tattooing, is that it all looks like I did it. It could be Japanese or flowers or a load of gory stuff; I don't have a label I guess, I just tattoo things in my own way, for people that like it.

"It's textured – sketchy/painterly. Nothing looks very shiny. I use as much black as possible and also use very old machines at the moment because I want to see what I can do with those before I start changing my kit around too much. I love needle marks in tattoos, just like I love brush strokes in paintings.

"When I see the work that's out there these days, I'm honestly gobsmacked as to why anyone wants to travel and get tattooed by me, but my God I'm grateful and honoured that they do. It is nice to know people like my tattoos because I think I tattoo in a weird way. Even my colleagues think so too. That said, I'm still totally happy and fine with what I do. I'll just be the best Amanda I can be, and as long as I'm doing that, with the result of happy clients, I am satisfied."

We seem to have come out of the cult of celebrity now when it comes to TV. Personally, I think it's all over bar the shouting and the aftermath any mainstream media might want to make of it. It's probably a broad question, but Glouscester is as good an example as anywhere, so… did it make an impact on the day-to-day happenings of Alzone? There was a lot of criticism about how people would think sleeves didn't take very long, but did that really happen in the real world?

> DON'T BE SURPRISED, IF I DO A LITTLE ROOFING OR COSMETIC PROCEDURES IN THE FUTURE, WITH MY STUFF OFF EBAY!

"Weirdly, Gloucester has been about ten years behind bigger cities in the trend of tattooing. Tattoo TV shows certainly accelerated the amount of people asking for cool stuff. It also made them do a little more homework before coming in and saying that classic line 'I want a tattoo, but I don't know what I want'. People

I DO FEEL VERY FORTUNATE THAT I HAVE A GREAT BUNCH OF CLIENTS. I REALLY SEEM TO LUCK OUT IN THAT RESPECT. ALL MY CLIENTS SEEM TO BE FUN AND NICE, SPIRITED PEOPLE

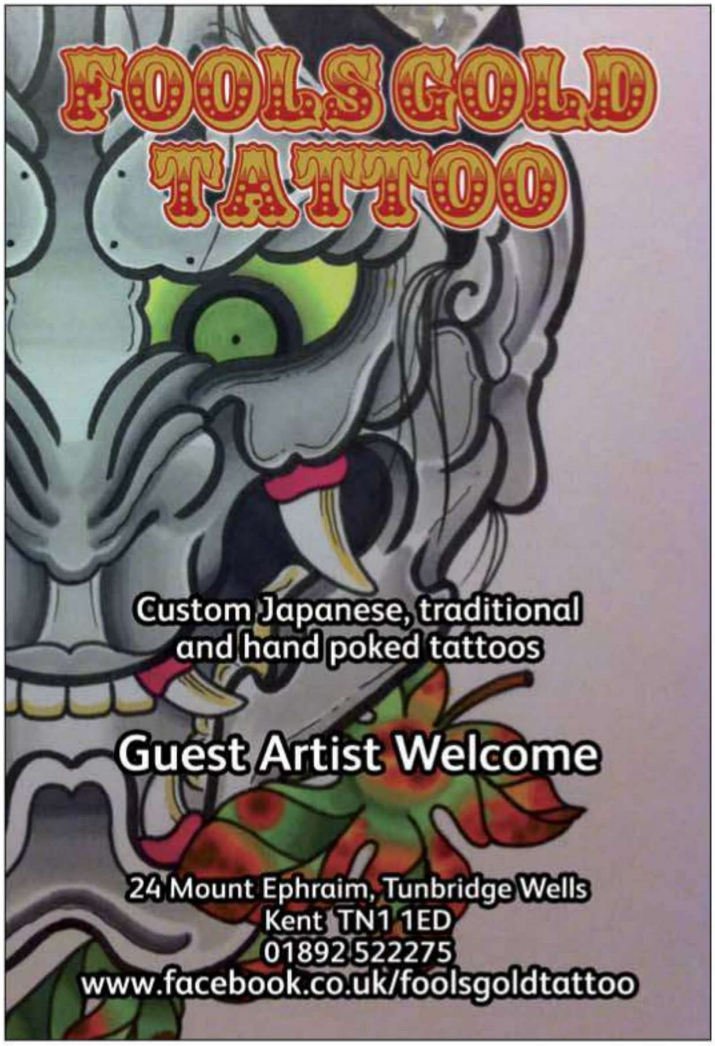
are way more open to letting me interpret their ideas in my own way, which is brilliant. As I said before, the darker side is the amount of people tattooing from home – the amount of people working from home that have just 'set up shop' to 'cash in' on the latest thing, and the amount of people that will get tattooed by someone without researching them, and those who think that even though it's half the price, it won't make any difference to the quality of work.

"I feel very fortunate that I have a great bunch of clients; I really seemed to luck out in that respect. All my clients seem to be fun and nice, spirited people. I enjoy spending time with every one of them and I'm so proud of being able to make these people happy with their tattoos because they make me enjoy my job more by being fun, flexible, kind and really good people to be around. I wish I could describe every client I tattoo and the chats I've had with them. Being at work is such a positive thing, so I guess the answer to that is that tattoo TV has over-saturated and over-killed a lot about tattooing, but I'm floating along in Amanda world where I am lucky enough to be able to ignore the bad and focus on the good things. With the help of my superb work colleagues, clients & friends of course."

I pulled a quote from Amanda's (not so distant) past about her painting and art that we had kicking around. It went something along the lines of "these are things that people would never get tattooed that I need to see on canvas" – and wonder if this is still the case?

"I have tattooed a few more surreal things, and have actually done a couple of tattoos based around some paintings! There are a couple of people out there wanting my daft, jokey but pretty things done. Again, I can't ever be grateful enough to the tattoo industry and to clients for the things I get to tattoo.

"The only thing I ever really complain about is time… I have none! I really do make life all about my kids and my job, so a social life is something I'm bad at. I haven't even had time to paint lately because of drawing work. Sometimes, I eat Pot Noodles for tea because I have no time for sea bass or prawns! Painting and tattooing are blended – I have no choice because I have no time to paint right now, so my clients are getting that chucked in there too. God bless 'em for being so easy going…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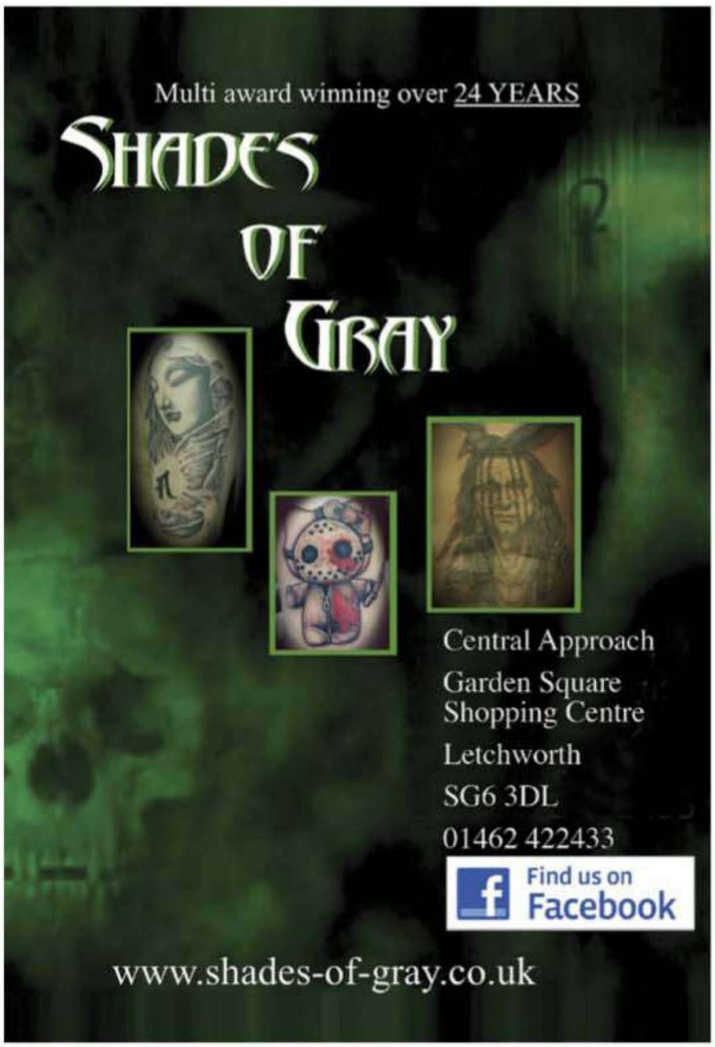
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ODYSSEY OF XENESIS

HYBRID THEORY

It's 1994 and two young musicians are trying to break into the notoriously difficult music scene. Being realistic as well as passionate about their dreams, they decide to open a tattoo studio to fall back on if things don't go as planned...

Trent Aitken-Smith Tom Preston and Mark Fiore.

Jump forward nearly 20 years and not only is Club Tattoo one of the most respected tattoo studios around, but one of the partners, Chester Bennington, is lead singer for one of the biggest bands on the planet, Linkin Park.

And this is where I find myself in the summer of 2012; one foot in Los Angeles while Linkin Park are tightening up their latest album and one foot in Las Vegas, where Sean and Thora Dowdell (co-owners of Club Tattoo with Chester) are finalising the opening of their latest tattoo studio in San Francisco. So it is into the middle of this organised chaos that we descend. What better time to sit down with Chester and Sean and discuss how the two friends have changed the face of music and ink?

"Chester and I were playing in a band and started touring quite a bit," starts Sean. "We needed a way to still make a living while we were out on the road and came up with the idea of the tattoo shop. In all honesty I didn't know much about the business when I got into it and had to learn fast. In Arizona at that time there were only seven shops in the entire state, so there wasn't a plethora of artists around either. We then opened a second studio in Tempe in 2000, which was followed by a third in Mesa, a fourth in Glendale, and then finally the flagship studio in Vegas in 2009. Once this business model opened, we realized it was the future of the tattoo business and that was the business model that we wanted to follow from now on with opening studios."

USELESS LINKIN PARK TRIVIA: Linkin Park's song Leave Out all the Rest is also the name of an episode of the crime drama CSI. The song is also played in the opening and ending scenes and some of the elements from the song are used in the episode.

"I knew that Sean and Thora were creating a new philosophy and approach," adds Chester. "They were bringing the body art business out of the shadows and right into everyone's face. The business was already a success before they asked if I would like to become a partner in the expansion of Club Tattoo. In fact, they did not need a partner but when they asked I got really excited because I have been around Club Tattoo since 1995

and helped Sean put it together in the beginning so I knew it could be huge. This was really a chance for Sean and I to do something that we are both passionate about in the same way were passionate about playing music together. We really loved playing in the band together, and still continue to do little fun side projects every now and then."

"It is rare these days for Chester and I to jam," continues Sean, "But we did do a side project a couple of years ago that we took on the road for a bit called BOW. I love playing with Chester and always will when time permits. We throw huge Club Tattoo parties in Arizona and Las Vegas and at those events we play together on stage with several industry friends in front of 4,000-6,000 people… and honestly, that brings back some great memories."

With the boys steering things onto music, it seemed as good a time as any to ask Chester more about the new album and how it was all going.

"We have just finished mixing Living Things and we couldn't be happier, it's finally coming to life! I actually stay out of the mixing process for the most part. Mike and Brad are very involved on that end and we have several different studios that we mix from, but we record most of the tracks at NRG studios in North Hollywood. Building up to the release of a new record is always very exciting. We are really proud of these songs, and feel like we've captured the creative spirit of Minutes to Midnight and A Thousand Suns with the energy of Hybrid Theory and Meteora. It's a perfect blend of everything we've learned throughout our musical journey."

As with the last two Linkin Park albums, the legend that is Rick Rubin, is on the helm as producer. Rubin's musical history is as varied as Linkin Park's source of inspiration, covering every genre from rap through to country – this is a musical partnership made in heaven.

"Working with Rick has really helped us achieve the goals we set out for ourselves after the release of Meteora. He is the only producer I can think of that has successfully worked in more genres of music than we mix together in ours. The fact that he has the ability to pull the best out of whomever he works with is astounding. Most producers are good at one or two things; perhaps they are great at rock and pop, but they lack an understanding of hip hop and electronic music. We need someone who is great at all of those things, and Rick has that rare set of skills. I believe the combination of Rick and Mike

Walter Sausage Frank Club Tattoo Las Vegas

THIS WAS REALLY A CHANCE FOR SEAN AND I TO DO SOMETHING THAT WE ARE BOTH PASSIONATE ABOUT IN THE SAME WAY WERE PASSIONATE ABOUT PLAYING MUSIC TOGETHER

LEGEND HAS IT THAT:
They chose 'Linkin Park' because Chester used to drive by Lincoln Park in Santa Monica, CA, after practice and it grabbed his attention. The guys in the band liked how it sounded, but they changed the spelling so that they could buy the domain, since lincolnpark.com was already taken and was too expensive to buy!

Chris Garcia Club Tattoo Las Vegas

producing our records together has inspired the best work we've done in our career."

A Thousand Suns, Linkin Park's previous album, was layered with big dance beats whilst being a very political record. This is something that has become a trademark with Linkin Park; the continual mix of ideas and genres, the quest to keep it fresh every time. On Living Things, the boys are still turning it way up with their hard hitting musical style, but this time round they have made a more personal album.

"On our new record we dove mostly into themes about relationships and all of the beautiful and ugly aspects of them. Our creative process is probably different than what most people imagine it would be like. We never go into making a record with any preconceived themes or concepts. That tends to restrict creativity for us rather than focus it. Even during the making of ATS, we threw out the idea of making a concept record very early on. It became a concept record instead very organically and almost by accident. Plus, I think we got a lot of the social and political stuff off of our chests and went into this record with a clean slate.

WE ARE REALLY PROUD OF THESE SONGS, AND FEEL LIKE WE'VE CAPTURED THE SPIRIT OF MINUTES TO MIDNIGHT AND A THOUSAND SUNS WITH THE ENERGY OF CREATIVE HYBRID THEORY AND METEORA

The style of this record though, is high energy, big beats, crushing guitars, and pulsing electronics. Our writing process is very organic and very little thought is put into what the record should sound like. We actually have never sat down and jammed. We don't play the songs together until we rehearse them for touring purposes. We always try to push ourselves creatively and stay fresh and excited about making music. Complacency is the enemy of creativity."

And this ideal is not only evident in the band, but also in the whole ethos of Club Tattoo. It is no use getting to the top and then sitting around thinking everything is sweet, the real hard work is maintaining that high and continuously producing something fresh and exciting. And Club Tattoo is no exception.

"In 2002 Sean and Thora asked me where I saw Club Tattoo going in the next ten years," explains Chester. "Worldwide was my first response but the thought of opening shops all over the world and doing it successfully was not realistic at that time. So I suggested that we go somewhere where the world would come to us... Las Vegas. So we began our journey to Sin City and continued our full-on assault in Arizona.

"If we could make a shop in Vegas meet our expectations of creating the flagship Club Tattoo experience, then perhaps taking on the rest of the world wouldn't seem so out of reach. And to that point, now we are opening our newest flagship studio in San Francisco this summer."

"San Francisco gave us the opportunity to do just that," adds Sean. "It had the foot traffic and tourism base that we wanted to display our concept in, the large stage and prestige that we feel Club Tattoo has prided itself on being. The great artists that we have of course is truly what makes Club Tattoo great on a worldwide stage as far as talent, but we think that the atmosphere and presentation of those artists and piercers is what makes it completely unique. Having this unique concept is what makes Club Tattoo special, sets us apart from the rest of the world of tattoo shops and ultimately sets the

CHESTER BENNINGTON, ROLLING STONE MAGAZINE, 2002
"It's easy to fall into that thing – 'poor, poor me', that's where songs like 'Crawling' come from: I can't take myself. But that song is about taking responsibility for your actions. I don't say 'you' at any point. It's about how I'm the reason that I feel this way. There's something inside me that pulls me down."

Ian Loughlin Club Tattoo Mesa

Sean Dowdell Owner of Club Tattoo

Thora Dowdell Owner of Club Tattoo

IN 2002, SEAN AND THORA ASKED ME WHERE I SAW CLUB TATTOO GOING IN THE NEXT TEN YEARS, WORLDWIDE WAS MY FIRST RESPONSE BUT THAT WASN'T AT THE TIME REALISTIC

trend for the tattoo studios around the world to try and follow."

And this is something that is very important to Club Tattoo, creating an experience that blows customers away as well as having some of the best tattooists in the world under their banner. But as Sean points out, this hasn't always been as easy as it seems. There is no overnight success, just a lot of hard graft and determination.

"I wish we always got it right, but honestly it is the hardest part of doing what we do. For the most part, the high calibre tattooers will find us and start a dialogue and eventually we bring them on board. But in Arizona it is a catch-22 because the artists that don't work for us have to compete with us. This sometimes causes animosity and can be more difficult to bring in talent when we need to add to the team. Overall, it has worked out great, but at times can be trying."

Not only are Club Tattoo known for their amazing tattoos, but Sean has been instrumental in pushing the art of body modification into a completely new arena. If you caught his master class at Tattoo Jam 2012, you would have seen how important doing it right is to Sean. "The invention of Micro-Dermal Anchors has been the newest fashion trend in piercing for the last five years, and I am sure it will continue to grow. The only thing that bums me out with the industries popularity is the fact that so many people just think they can pick up a tattoo machine and start tattooing, or that they can pierce people without the proper training or apprenticeship.

"I wish the industry as a whole would slow down apprentices teaching apprentices and get back to taking it very seriously. This is one of the reasons that I started teaching piercers around the world. I hope that the future for piercing is one of growing safety and knowledge seeking, rather than guys that just seem to want to look cool and do shoddy work."

Quickly it is becoming obvious, that we aren't dealing with businessmen trying to make a quick buck off a 'new fashion'. Sean and Chester are determined to make Club Tattoo the best they can, pushing boundaries in ink and skin. And one person, who is there all the time, making sure the boys aren't just jamming and having fun, is Sean's wife Thora.

"When Chester moved away and became part of Linkin Park, I joined the business and we were able to reconnect with him a few years later on our third shop. He was ready to, 'take over the world with Club Tattoo'. Sean and I already had good momentum in the business and jumped into the next phase of building this awesome brand that we have now become. For those who don't know the history, they may be curious about the integrity of our business with a celebrity partner;

SOME MAY BE CURIOUS ABOUT THE INTEGRITY OF OUR BUSINESS WITH A CELEBRITY PARTNER

Joe Riley Club Tattoo, Las Vegas

MINUTES TO MIDNGHT TRIVIA

A year after the release of Minutes to Midnight, the band released all ten different covers that were originally used as consideration for the final cover for the album prior to its release. The band made these covers available for fans to use as the album art on iTunes

however you shake it, you cannot fake great artists, piercers and a talented crew of employees who believe in where they work and what they work for... even with a celebrity partner/ owner.

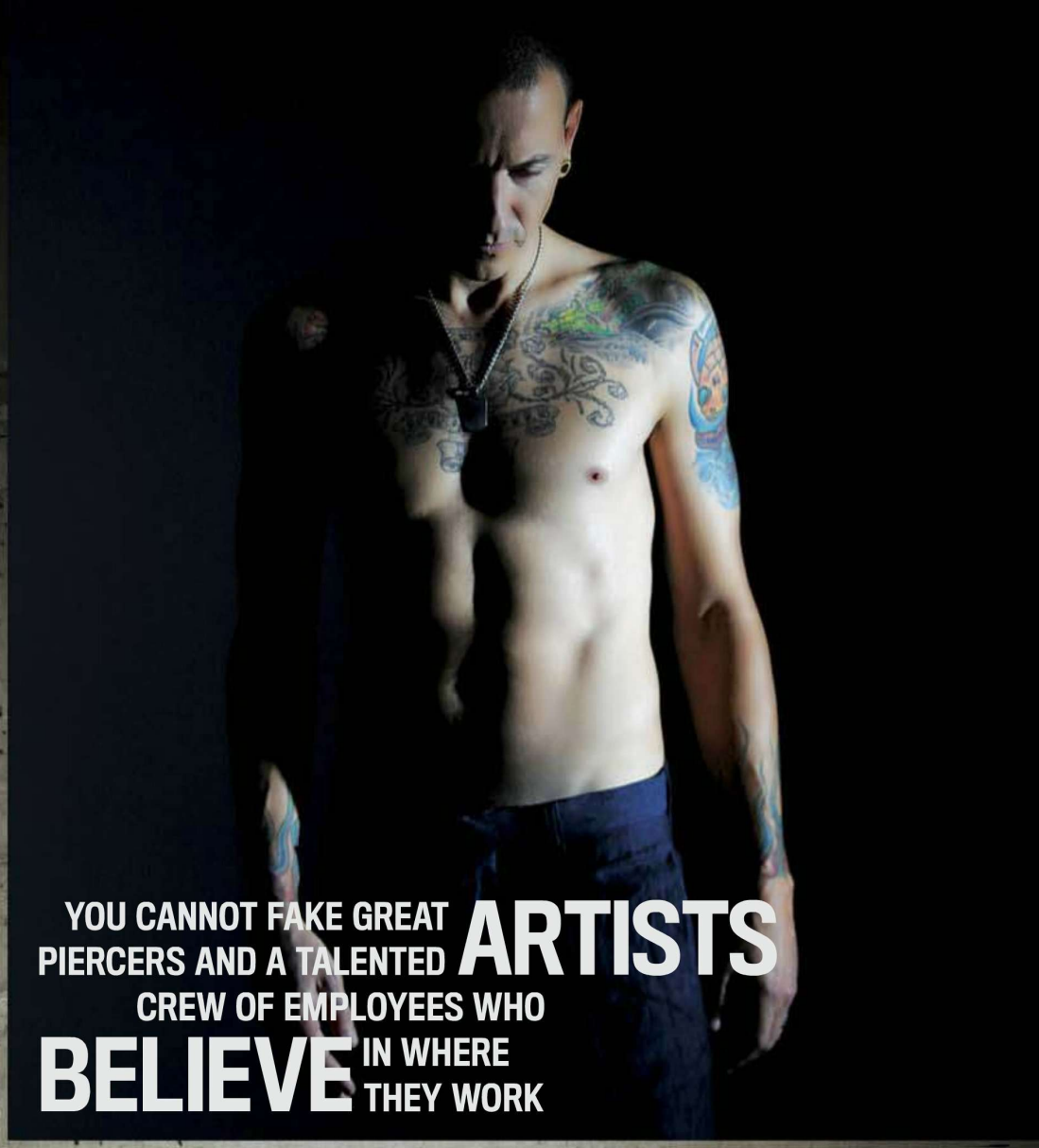
"After over 14 years of being in charge of all operations and administration of the stores, Sean and Chester are the easy part! Actually, both are very supportive and respectful of my duties within the company. Since Sean and I are married, we have a special balance between our personal and professional life. Chester has always been willing to listen and contribute great ideas to the business. And since we are all long-time friends, a special trust has been established with each other's roles and boundaries. I feel like women owners are few and far between in the industry. I purposely staff my stores with women employees and managers to balance the atmosphere for clients."

And this friendship is another point that is integral in the success of Club Tattoo. As with Linkin Park, family and friends are important to these three childhood friends.

"Club Tattoo is a prominent name in the business and attracts talented people from all over the world, making it fairly easy to staff our stores. Once in the organization (if I may speak for them), most artists, piercers and employees enjoy the family vibe and the structure we provide. Club Tattoo has been built on the loyalty and respect of all involved. This respect goes both ways, from us to them and likewise."

And this respect is shared by Chester as well. With visits to the studios restricted by his role in Linkin Park, he still gets to hang with Sean and Thora whenever he can.

"Linkin Park does take up most of my time, and the remaining time I have left I spend with my wife and kids. I do like to go into the shops and get work done and hangout when I get the chance, maybe once or twice a month on average. It's funny when we have a new employee that greets me like any one of our customers and asks if there is something they can help me with. I always get a little laugh out of that. There is nothing better than knowing what your role in life is. I am truly blessed to be a part of LP and Club Tattoo. Everyone around me is extremely driven, talented and intelligent. Hopefully one day I will be too."



YOU CANNOT FAKE GREAT PIERCERS AND A TALENTED ARTISTS CREW OF EMPLOYEES WHO BELIEVE IN WHERE THEY WORK

And this seems to be the secret of Club Tattoo, and no doubt, Linkin Park. It is one big family working together for a common goal, everyone has their role and everyone respects each other. Thankfully for music fans and collectors around the world, there seems no stopping Linkin Park or Club Tattoo. And with a new album ready for release and Club Tattoo on the brink of opening their latest studio in San Francisco, there is no time to rest as sights are being set on what is coming next, something that excites Chester already.

"I love the new style of tattooing that's popping up all over the world. With the techniques of tattooing evolving to higher levels of execution and the quality of modern inks allowing artists to achieve sharper lines and better blends, high calibre artists are being drawn to tattooing as a primary way to get the world to see their talent. Bodies today are really more like mobile galleries."

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Think before you Ink

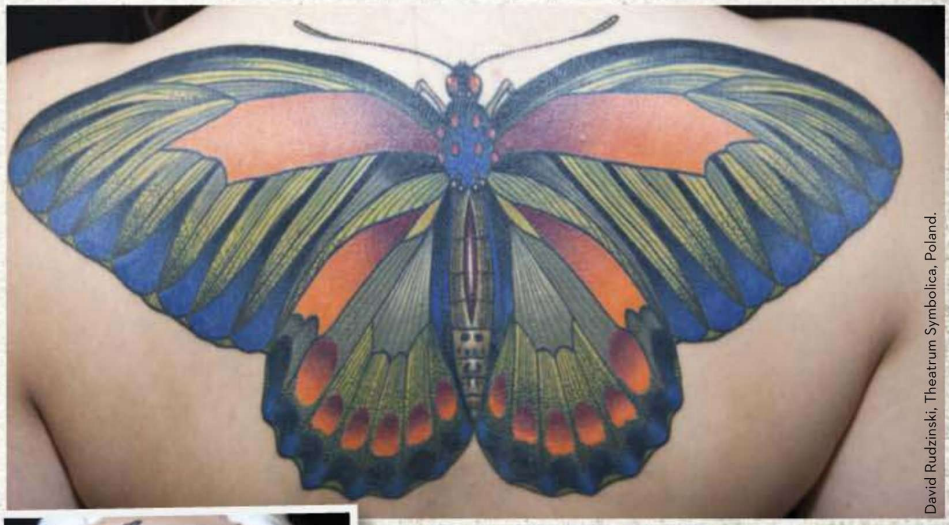
Everything you ever wanted to know - and some stuff you didn't - but were afraid to ask

As you would expect, at Skin Deep we get extreme amounts of mail from people thinking about getting their first tattoo. That mail covers everything imaginable from asking us to recommend studios, artists, aftercare – and curiously, sometimes even going so far as to ask us to suggest designs.

To try to answer those emails in every single issue of the magazine would be foolish. After all, once you've popped your tattoo cherry, you probably won't want to read about it ever again. Thus, once a year, we like to pay homage to those of you starting your journey. We hope you find all you're looking for in it, find out some things you didn't already know and take on board the advice given out here.

No matter how big or small your tattoo is going to be, let's not forget, it's for life. Getting divorced from an unwanted tattoo with laser treatment is not pleasant. If you think getting your tattoo will smart a bit in the chair, the laser takes no prisoners! On this basis alone, it's worth putting serious thought into what you're about to undertake. Sure you can cover it up… maybe. But wouldn't it be much cooler all round to simply get it right first time?

Any tattooist worth their salt will be happy to talk the process over with you, but ultimately, the more you know about the process before you start, the more confident you will be about making your own decisions. Forewarned really is forearmed and hey… let's not end up as one of those nightmare newspaper headlines that everybody except you is laughing at.



David Rudzinski, Theatrum Symbolica, Poland.

Bartosz Panas, Caffeine, Poland.

Sion Smith

Agnieszka Hairesis courtesy of Tattoofest Krakow

JUST WHEN EVERYBODY THOUGHT TATTOOING HAD REACHED ITS PEAK, IT WENT AND BLEW THE LID OFF AND RAISED THE BAR EVEN FURTHER WITH WHAT'S POSSIBLE

Just when everybody thought tattooing had reached its peak, it went and blew the lid off and raised the bar even further with what's possible. It has never been so popular as it is right now. Consequently, your choices have increased dramatically, but so have the pitfalls – some average sized towns in the UK have over 50 studios to choose from. That's an awful lot of choice if you don't know what you want. Your first tattoo has the ability to empower you if you choose wisely. Conversely, if you choose wrongly, your first tattoo also has the ability to disable you. Let's get this party started…

Kamil Mocet, Kamil Tattoos, UK.

Do you really want that?

The question has to be asked. It's a huge step for both you and your body. If you're thinking along the lines that it will be small enough to undergo a cover up tattoo or have it removed by those aforementioned friendly lasers, don't do it. Your tattoo should be treated with respect – and that respect is to wear it for the rest of your life as a good and informed choice that marks out why, where and who you got it tattooed by. This means the right design put in the right place by the right tattooist.

In the UK, you must be 18 to have a tattoo. There's no get-out clause like a letter of permission from your parents either. If you look young, don't be afraid to show your ID card and do it by the book. Treat your chosen tattooist with some respect too – they can get in a heap of trouble for tattooing minors. Nobody likes to have the mickey taken out of them. Try and make it a very simple win-win situation for all involved.

Marcin Surowiec, Malpy w Cyrku, Poland.

YOUR TATTOO SHOULD BE TREATED WITH RESPECT – AND THAT RESPECT IS TO WEAR IT FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIFE AS A GOOD AND INFORMED CHOICE

Marked for life

If you've thought about getting a tattoo, then you've probably thought about a design already… and then another design, and then another. Then you'll go and buy a truckload of tattoo magazines to see what else is out there and you may well change your mind again and again and again. Don't panic. This is perfectly normal behaviour, and good behaviour too. By taking your time to choose what you really want, you're already increasing your chances of not being sorry about it later.

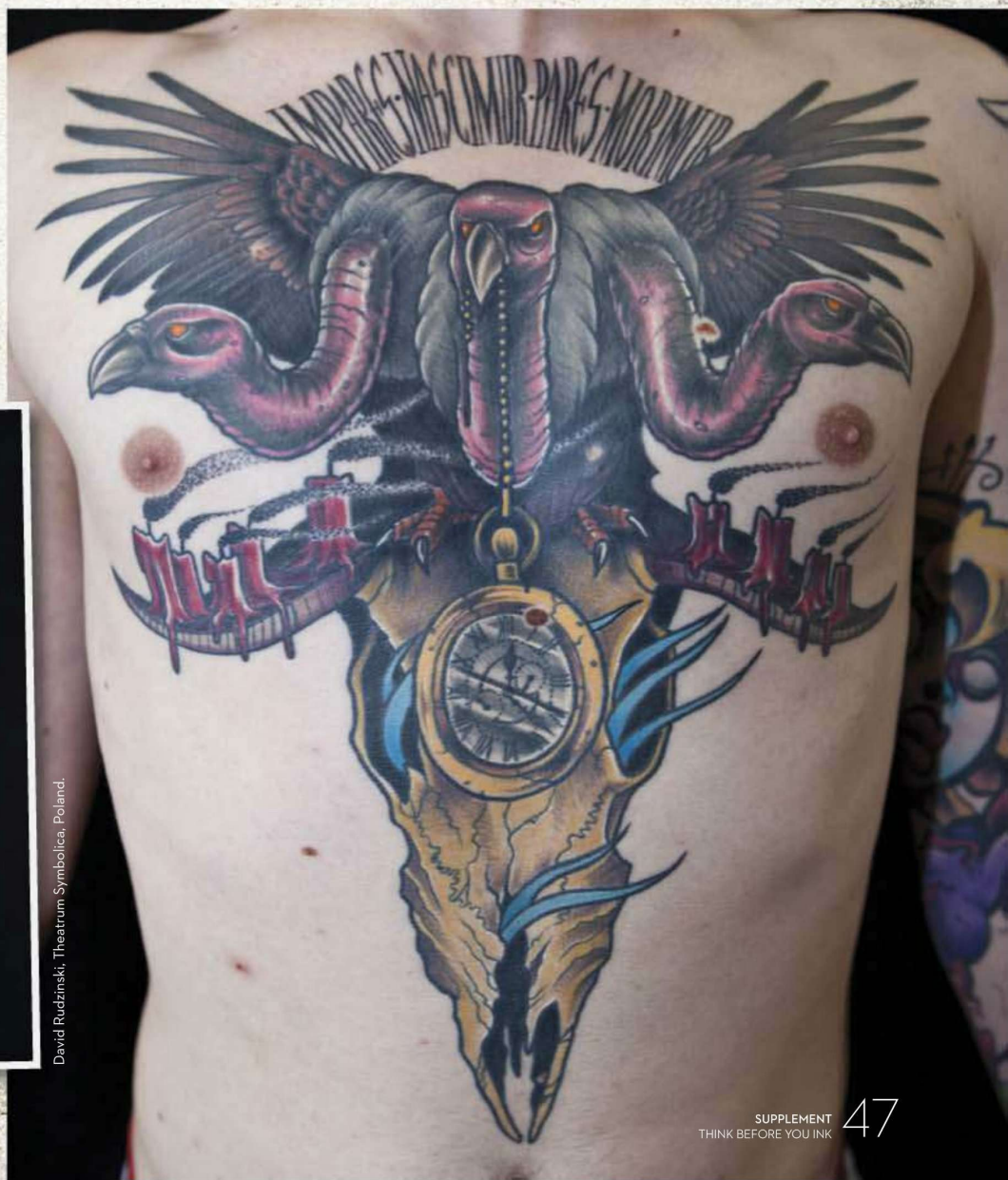
Simply buying all those magazines for inspiration is a step in the right direction when it comes to self education. As we sit here in 2012, there is almost nothing that can't be turned into a tattoo – the only limit is your imagination. Many studios have pre-drawn designs available either in poster racks or books for you to look at that are known in the trade as 'flash'. There is no shortage of books on the shelf either with content ranging from traditional designs to the most bizarre you are ever likely to see. Tattooing however, is all about individuality. Without telling you what to do, most of us who are tattooed already will tell you every single time that the best road to go down is with a unique piece, or a 'custom design'. Speak to your chosen artist – even if you are using flash or a picture in a book as a basis, it can always be modified in some way.

It's your tattoo we're talking about here. You can take your inspiration from wherever you want. From your hobbies, passions, history, art – that list is truly endless. Again, what a lot of us more experienced tattooed people will agree on is that it's probably not a great idea to work with lovers names, football clubs, band names and political statements… things change. It may not seem like it, but these things sometimes have a habit of coming back and biting you on the ass. Time specific themes are also not a great idea. That commemorative Olympic 2012/ Coronation street party (not Coronation Street… that would be very cool) tattoo you were thinking about? Well, a month or two on it won't seem like quite such a good idea no matter how much fun it appeared to be at the time! You may laugh, but they will be out there for the Daily Mail to abuse at their leisure. Also, don't be afraid to get the Sharpies out and draw your proposed design onto yourself to be able to check it out in the mirror. Over and over again if you need to.

Whatever your choice, be happy with what you have in mind before you even step through the door.

DON'T BE AFRAID TO GET THE SHARPIES OUT AND DRAW YOUR PROPOSED DESIGN ONTO YOURSELF TO BE ABLE TO CHECK IT OUT IN THE MIRROR

Arek, Jokers Tattoo, Poland.



David Rudzinski, Theatrum Symbolica, Poland.

How big, and where is it going to be?

Popular choices for a first tattoo are the back, shoulders and upper arms as these can be easily covered up with clothing – it's probably also one of the most 'comfortable' places on the body to start out. Relatively speaking. Sure, you will want to show it off to as many people as possible, but there may be occasions when you want to hide it temporarily. Not everybody is as open-minded as you are, and you might not get the reaction you think you will. Job interview anybody? It's probably not a smart idea to get your first tattoo on the back of your hand or your neck. At some point in time, we all find ourselves in situations where the tattoo becomes the focus – if it's your first one, it really is handy to be able to cover it if you need to. Big tattoos are very popular right now, but you can still achieve this with some forethought and partake in the rest of your life as well as please yourself.

AT SOME POINT IN TIME, WE ALL FIND OURSELVES IN SITUATIONS WHERE THE TATTOO BECOMES THE FOCUS – IF IT'S YOUR FIRST ONE, IT REALLY IS HANDY TO BE ABLE TO COVER IT IF YOU NEED TO

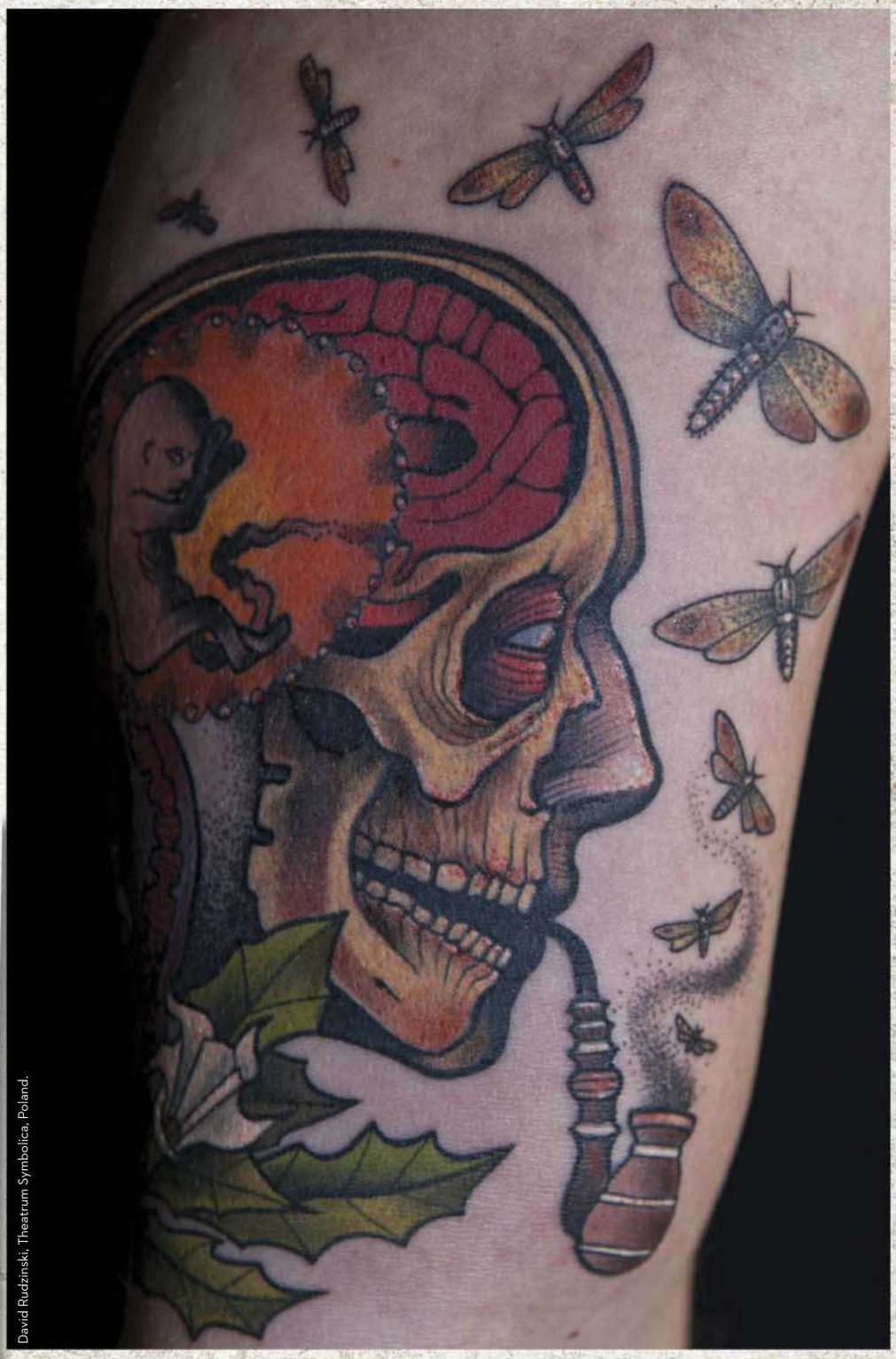
Agrypa, 9th Circle, Poland.

Bartosz Panas, Caffeine, Poland.

Your tattooist

In the real world, more often that not, this is normally dictated by how much money you have to spend – and that's the wrong way to go about it. You should be getting what you want, not what you can get, but once you're all fired up and ready to go with your design and placement, the next stage is to choose who is going to do it for you.

To begin with, any tattoo studio/ shop/ parlour (all these words are hip to use at the moment) will need to be registered with the local health authority. By law, they will have a certificate hanging on the wall stating this. If you can't see it, ask. No registered studio will mind you doing this. If they haven't got one or can't produce it, simply turn around and walk straight back out again. Evenso, if there is a certificate but you feel uncomfortable about the surroundings you're in for whatever reason, do exactly the same. You need to be comfortable before you start. Many of us have been in that same boat, and why an awful lot of us choose to stay with the same tattooist for life, so this is more important than you might think at the moment.



David Rudzinski, Theatrum Symbolica, Poland.

David Rudzinski, Theatrum Symbolica, Poland.

MANY OF US HAVE BEEN IN THAT SAME BOAT, AND WHY AN AWFUL LOT OF US CHOOSE TO STAY WITH THE SAME TATTOOIST FOR LIFE, SO THIS IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN YOU MIGHT THINK AT THE MOMENT

You should also be able to see the autoclave – it looks just like a microwave and is used to sterilise re-usable equipment. Again, if you can't see it, just ask. This is an important bit of kit in the studio and makes the difference between getting a tattoo in a safe environment, and blood borne diseases and infection. This is why it's important to choose a studio wisely and not opt for getting

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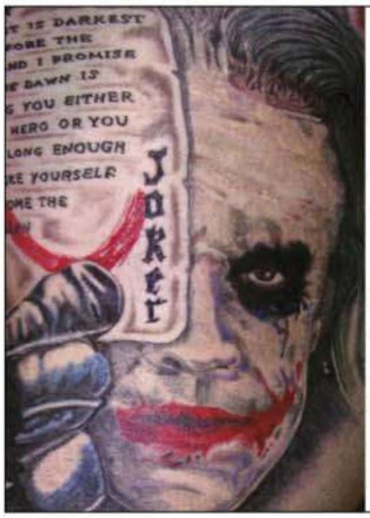

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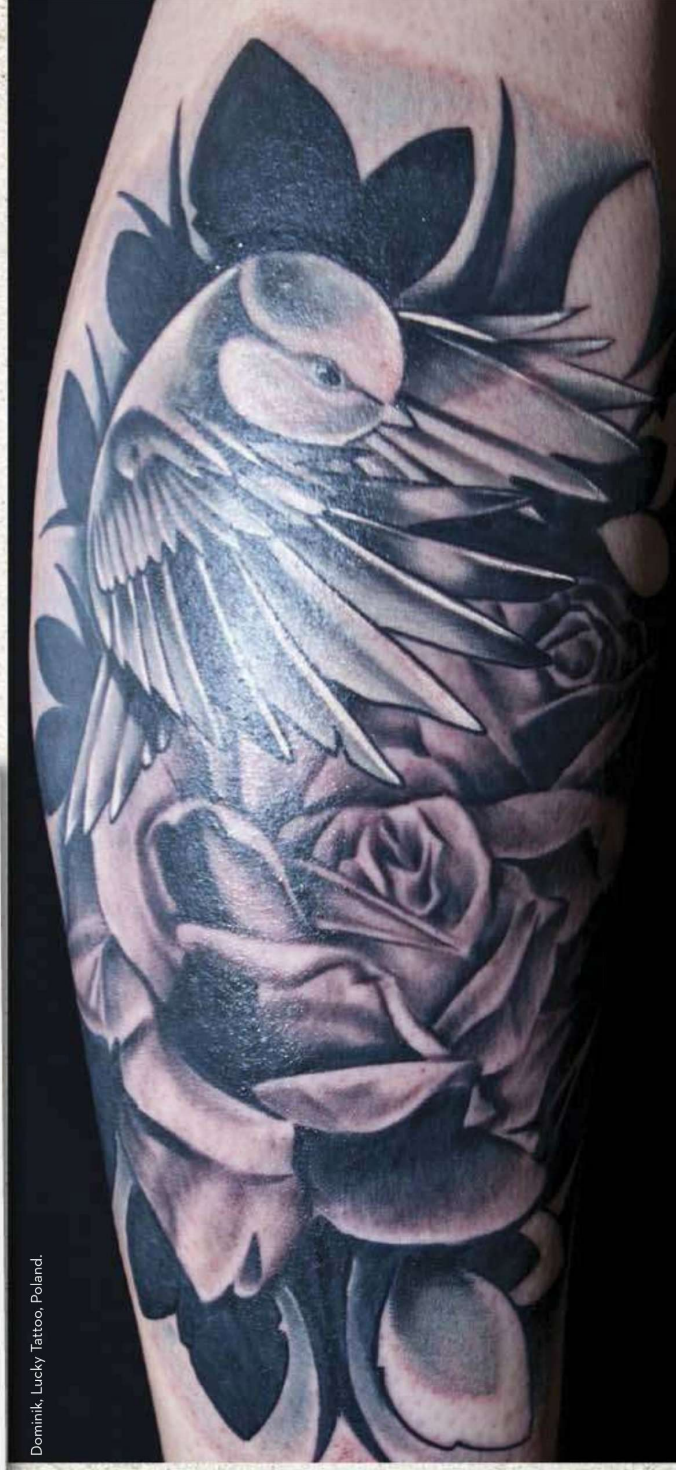
tattooed by your mate in their kitchen just because it's cheap. It's a dumb idea and I guarantee you will pay for it one way or another, either by getting a cover-up pretty soon afterwards, or worse…

On the flip-side of the coin, don't fall for the cosmetic option either. Just because the proprietor of the studio had enough money to buy all new kit and get their certificate, etc., doesn't mean they're a good tattooist. Check out their work from pictures and personal recommendations as well. Get down to these places and see what they can do for you.

As I said earlier, the amount of money you've got in your pocket shouldn't dictate what you have tattooed. Here's a crazy thought for you. If what you really want is expensive and you think a tattooist in Poland is the one who can do it best, save up. At the risk of sounding like a dinosaur parent, it's good advice. Get what you want, not what you can afford. With so many conventions all year round at the moment, chances are your favoured artist will be attending one of them sooner or later – and if not, get yourself

Aldona, Szery Tattoo, Poland.



Dominik, Lucky Tattoo, Poland.

JUST BECAUSE THE PROPRIETOR OF THE STUDIO HAD ENOUGH MONEY TO BUY ALL NEW KIT AND GET THEIR CERTIFICATE, ETC., DOESN'T MEAN THEY'RE A GOOD TATTOOIST

over there and you'll have a story to tell for the rest of your life.

To wrap this little section up, use your common sense. If you're a young lady who feels intimidated by men, there are just as many talented females working those machines these days. In fact, there is no mountain you can't get around to get exactly what you want. There's no rush. Do it right.

Does it hurt?

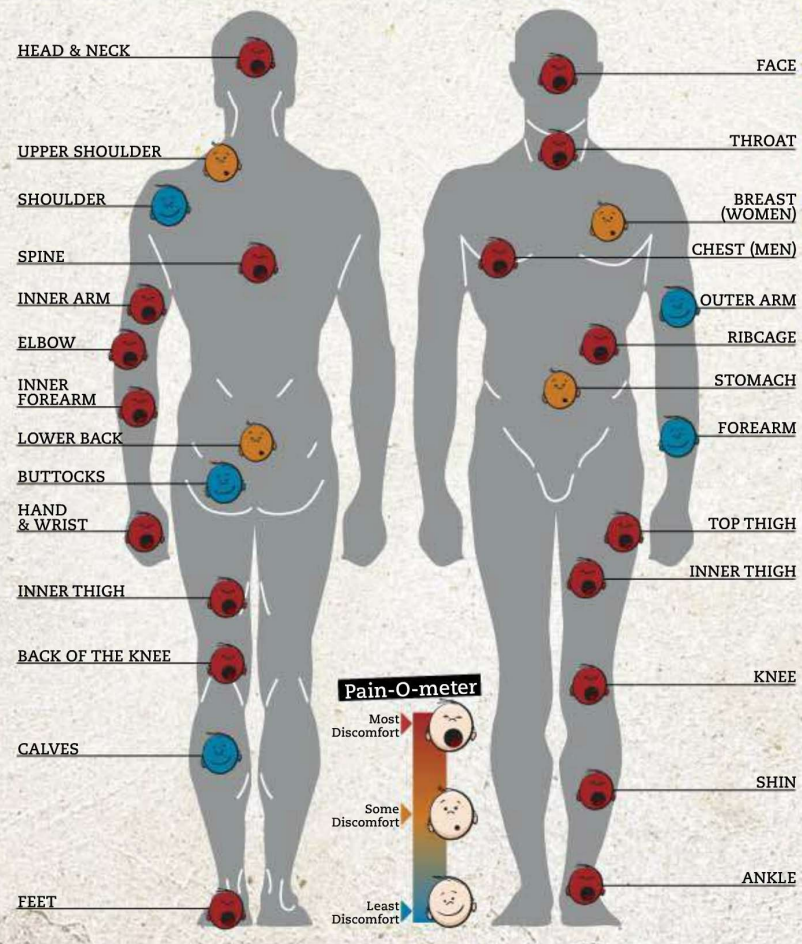
In a nutshell, yes. It does. How much rather depends on your personal threshold for such things. But you're going to feel something that's for sure!

What is actually going on while you're sitting there is a single needle or a series of needles (depending on what's actually going on) will be puncturing your skin at a reasonably fast speed. It's not too deep, but there will be puncturing and there will be some blood. The bigger the tattoo, the longer you'll have to sit there, but like any job, different tattooists will take different amounts of time to do it in.

To get some kind of guide as to exactly how much it will hurt, check out our sexy little diagram below. I've seen people sit through eight hours in a single session before now, but the only way you're ever going to find out exactly how much it hurts, is to go through it. It's all part of the deal – and strangely, a feeling you may even grow to like for what it represents.

Tofi, Inkognito, Poland.

Bartosz Panas, Caffeine, Poland.



THERE WILL BE PUNCTURING AND THERE WILL BE SOME BLOOD. THE BIGGER THE TATTOO, THE LONGER YOU'LL HAVE TO SIT THERE, BUT LIKE ANY JOB, DIFFERENT TATTOOISTS WILL TAKE DIFFERENT AMOUNTS OF TIME TO DO IT IN

Some studios will offer to numb you first – or you can ask or take your own cream if you feel the need. This basically consists of a numbing cream that once absorbed by the skin, will constrict the blood vessels and offer some degree of comfort. Having not ever tried this route personally, I won't comment on exactly how effective it is, but a little research on many of the online tattoo forums will soon turn up some people who will tell you all about it. Our own forum at *bigtattooplanet.com* will doubtless have many willing to give you advice on this.

Jarek Baka, Rock Tattoo, Poland.

Tofi, Inkognito, Polan.d

Jacob Pedersen, Crooked Moon Tattoo, Sweden.

Stupid question – What should I wear?

That's not such a stupid question. It's a pretty good question. Here's some things to bear in mind:

• Whatever you wear should be loose. You won't want anything too tight sitting on top of your tattoo when you leave.

• There may well be spillage! An old pair of jeans and a T-shirt that are clean but have seen better days is a good choice. As time goes on, you might even grow yourself a 'getting tattooed wardrobe'. What I'm saying here is don't wear your favourite gear down there. It's not messy, but things can happen.

• Think about what you're going to have to sit in the studio wearing. If you're having a thigh tattooed, you might not want to sit there in your knickers or pants. This is why the fashion gods invented skirts and shorts.

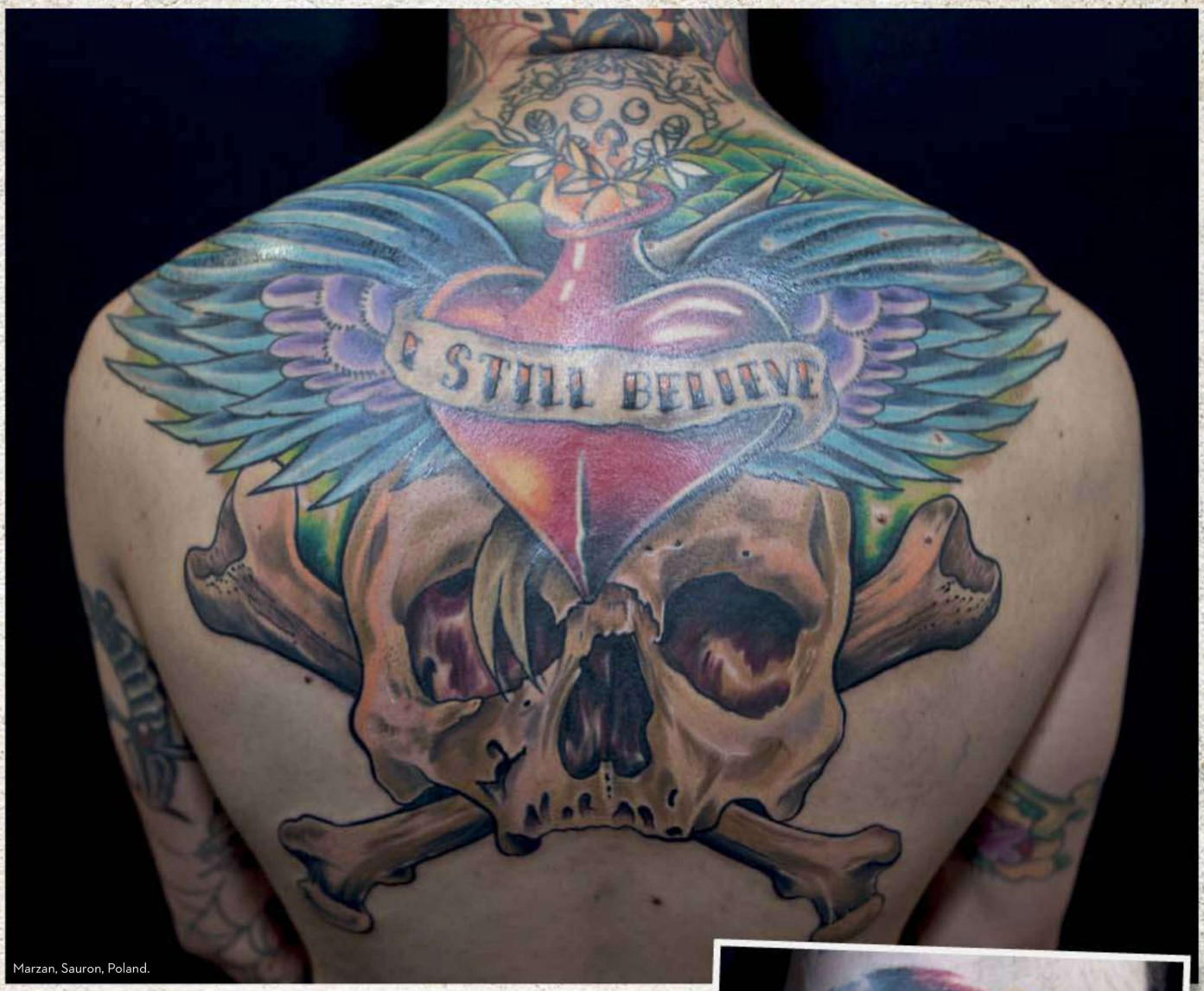
What happens when it's all over?

Once your tattoo is finished, you'll get cleaned up. Any excess ink and blood will be washed off with a spray and wiped down. What happens next depends on your tattooist. Some will cover your tattoo with cling film, some will cover it with a paper towel and tape – either way, you will be given aftercare instructions from them which will tell you how to help yourself to heal the fastest and stay safe. It's not a guarantee like you've just bought a car; it's your responsibility now to look after and keep clean.

DON'T FORGET TO EAT A COUPLE OF HOURS BEFOREHAND. THIS WILL HELP STOP YOU FROM FEELING TOO 'WOOZY' IN A LONG SESSION AS IT WILL KEEP YOUR BLOOD SUGAR LEVELS UP

Dominik, Miniol, Poland.

Lehel Nyeste, Skin workshop, Hungary.



Marzan, Sauron, Poland.

Anything else?

Sure... lots! Don't drink alcohol beforehand. It could make you bleed more heavily than you would normally. Some studios will turn you away if you have so it's your own deposit you're throwing away.

You should let the studio know of any medication you're on too. And if you're in any doubt at all, speak to your tattooist and they'll be able to help you out. Don't forget to eat a couple of hours beforehand. This will help stop you from feeling too 'woozy' in a long session as it will keep your blood sugar levels up.

It's OK to ask for a break. Really it is. Even just five minutes can put you back in the frame of mind for another two-hour sitting if that's what it takes, but you also need to let the tattooist do their job. If you've got a big piece on the cards, be prepared to sit for a good couple of hours before you start thinking of 'stretching your legs'.

At conventions, you'll see a lot of people sucking lollipops while they are being worked on – this is a good way to both keep your blood sugar levels up, take your mind of it for a little while, and look cool too.

AT CONVENTIONS, YOU'LL SEE A LOT OF PEOPLE SUCKING LOLLIPOPS WHILE THEY ARE BEING WORKED ON – THIS IS A GOOD WAY TO BOTH KEEP YOUR BLOOD SUGAR LEVELS UP, TAKE YOUR MIND OF IT FOR A LITTLE WHILE, AND LOOK COOL TOO

Tofi, Inkognito, Poland.

Here's what we know for a fact:

Tofi, Inkognito, Poland.

Don't scratch it. It will be tempting, but don't. Not even a little. After a day or so, it will scab over as it begins to heal itself. It may itch, it may peel, but don't scratch it. Or pick it. Or poke it… or anything similar. Let your body heal itself for pristine results. Picking it will basically pull the ink out of your tattoo and it won't be anybody's fault but your own.

Don't soak it in the bath or even think about swimming. There are many who will say that it's OK to go swimming after two weeks, but if it's not totally healed up by then, just don't. I'm no expert on swimming pool chemistry, but public pools generally harbour all kinds of bacteria from sweat and urine generated by rather a lot of people all at once. Couple these facts with the amount of chlorine normally dropped into public pools to combat these things, and you begin to get the picture without me having to take a course to tell you about it.

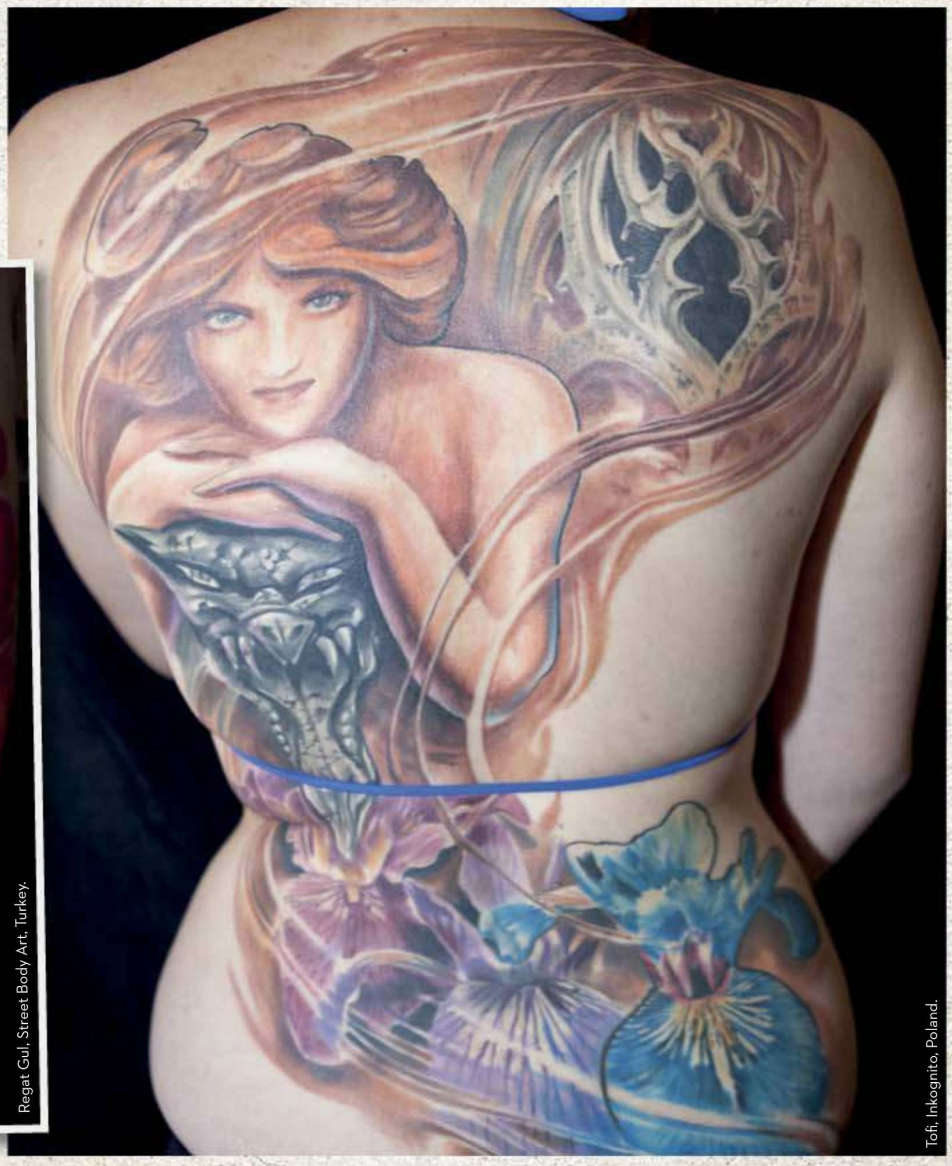
Likewise, don't get a tattoo simply to show off on your summer holiday. You need to take extra care with your tattoo in the sun, but we live in an era where this is common knowledge anyway, so you should be using sun protection as a matter of course. A massive percentage of my tattooed friends still protect their tattoos with factor 50-plus. I would suggest you do the same.

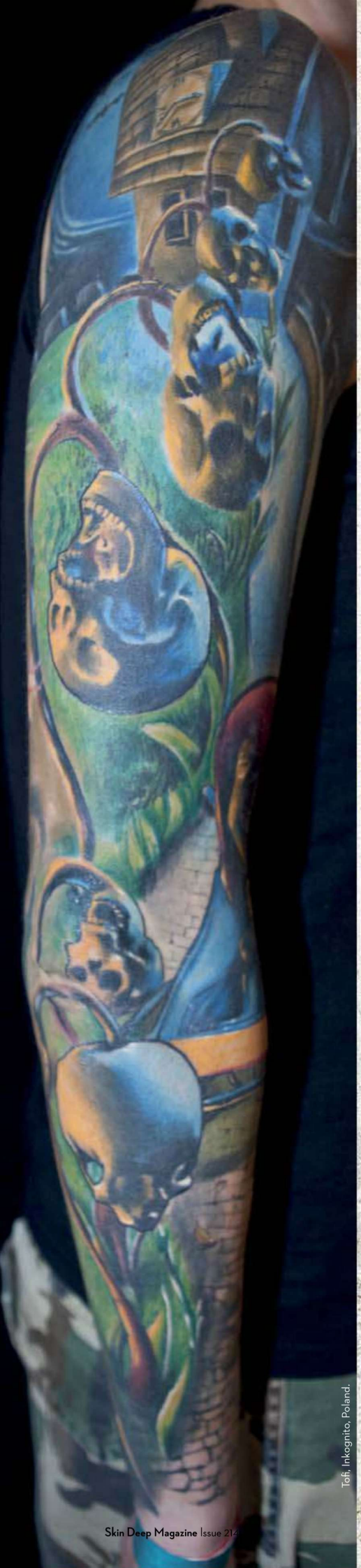
As a general rule, it will be a good week before you can say it's healed properly. After everything has healed and the peeling (a little like sunburn) has all flaked off, then you can go back to your normal life.

DON'T SOAK IT IN THE BATH OR EVEN THINK ABOUT SWIMMING. THERE ARE MANY WHO WILL SAY THAT IT'S OK TO GO SWIMMING AFTER TWO WEEKS, BUT IF IT'S NOT TOTALLY HEALED UP BY THEN, JUST DON'T

Your tattooist will tell you how he wants you to take care of it. You trusted them to mark you for life. Trust them to know what they're talking about afterwards.

Regat Gul, Street Body Art, Turkey.


Tofi, Inkognito, Poland.



Tofi, Inkognito, Poland.

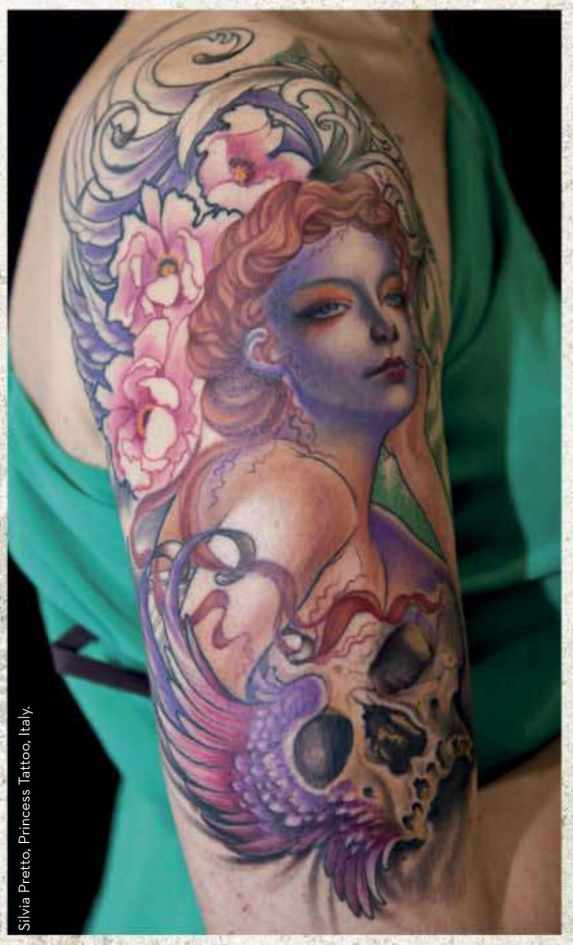
Aftercare

There is a wealth of products available for aftercare when it comes to tattoos. It wouldn't be fair to throw a spotlight on just one singular product, but you will probably find that the most popular amongst tattooists in the UK is Bepanthen.

Marketed as a nappy rash cream and a cure for chapped nipples, it works well keeping the scabbing to an absolute minimum, which allows your skin to hold more of the ink. It also stops the annoying itching sensation some people get whilst their tattoo is healing and heals fresh ink extremely quickly. It can also be easily bought over the counter at any pharmacy and almost all high street supermarkets.

Pawel, Panteon, Poland.

LIKEWISE, DON'T GET A TATTOO SIMPLY TO SHOW OFF ON YOUR SUMMER HOLIDAY. YOU NEED TO TAKE EXTRA CARE WITH YOUR TATTOO IN THE SUN, BUT WE LIVE IN AN ERA WHERE THIS IS COMMON KNOWLEDGE ANYWAY, SO YOU SHOULD BE USING SUN PROTECTION AS A MATTER OF COURSE



Silvia Pretto, Princess Tattoo, Italy.

It's not the only option though, and your tattooist may direct you towards products such as TattooGoo or Tattoo Wax (very popular worldwide), MOA (new kid on the block and liked by quite a few members of the Skin Deep team), Palmers Cocoa Butter (makes a great moisturiser when you're healed), and Ink Butter (another new kid on the block).

You'll doubtless find any or all of these at your tattoo studio. If not, there's an wealth of options online to order from. Recommended friends of ours are:

www.barberdts.co.uk
www.camtattoo.com
www.thegreenbalm.com
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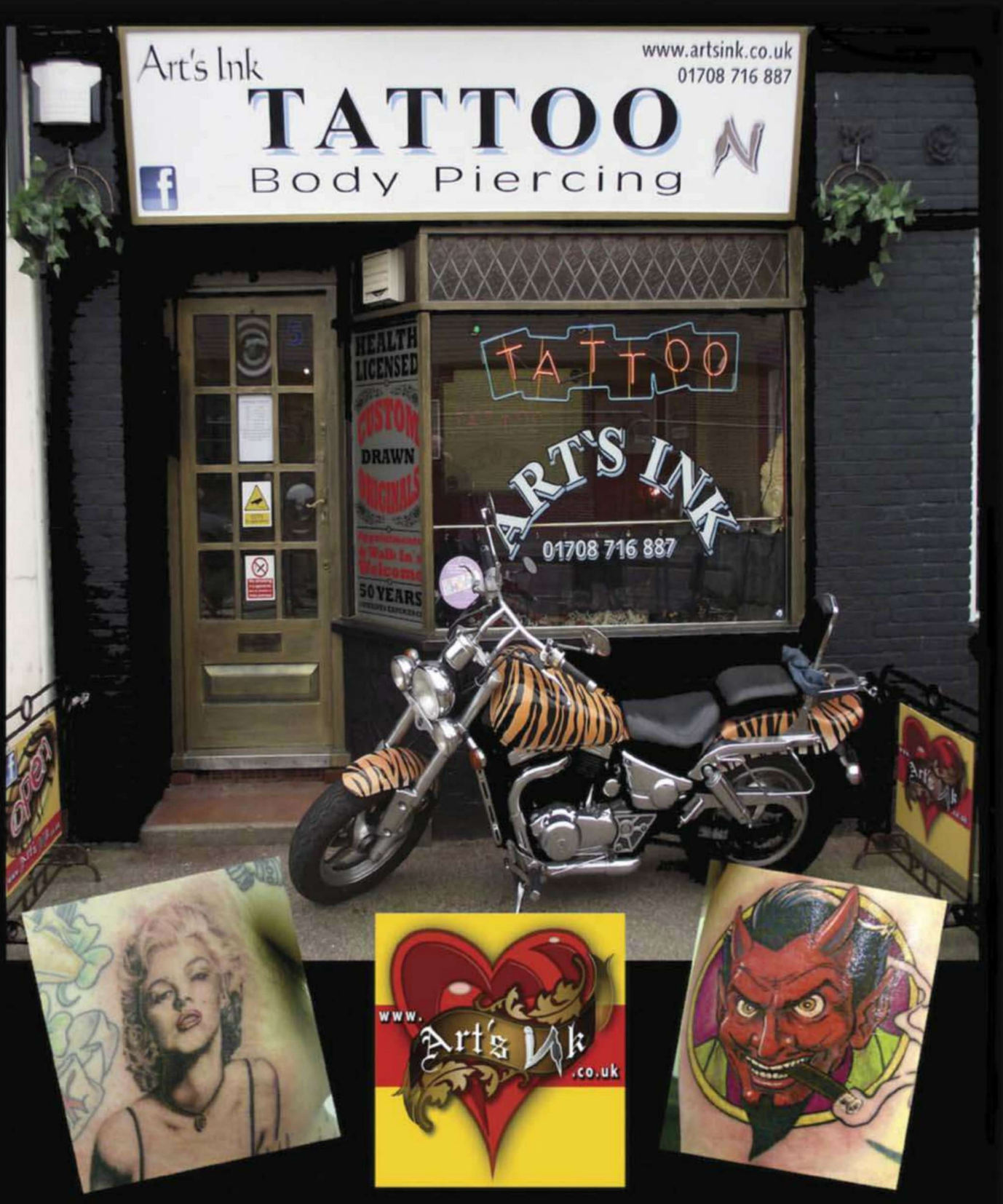

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HEAD START

The age of 12 is not usually a time when one begins experimenting with tattooing. Unless you're Myke Chambers that is, then it's just another day in the life...

"When I was 12, my friends and I started giving each other stick and poke tattoos, but that was just what kids do at that age, I think," says the Philadelphia-based artist who, leaving home with nothing but a backpack and his dog at just 15, began wandering the country as a vagabond until starting a tattoo apprenticeship in the 1990s, seems to have a penchant for getting a headstart on things.

"I remember skateboarding down the Drag as a little punk kid in Austin, Texas, and we'd go try to sneak a peak in on Dave Lum, a tattoo legend, before

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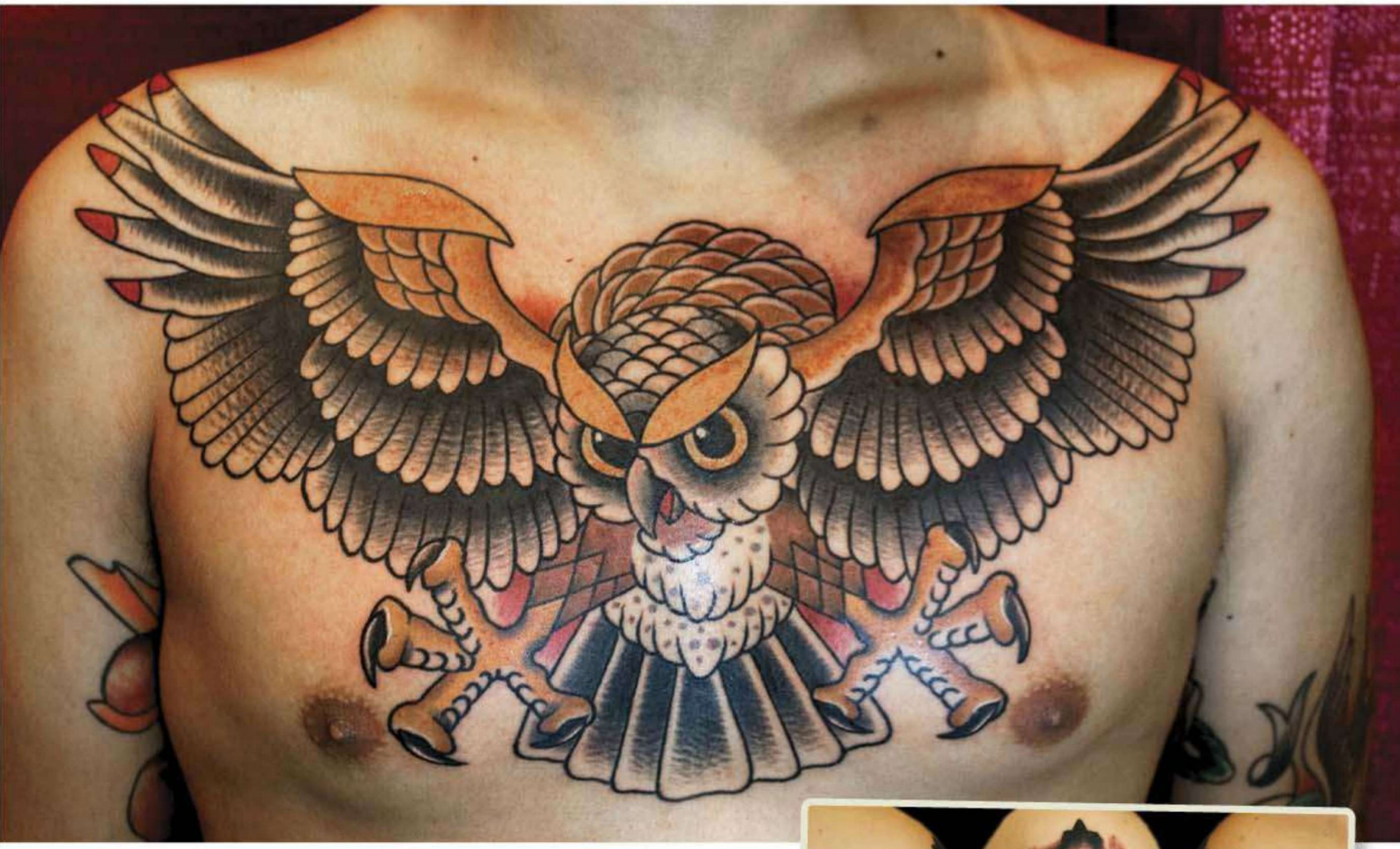


> AT THAT TIME TATTOOING WAS STILL PRETTY HARDCORE AND IT FIT RIGHT INTO MY LIFESTYLE OF GETTING DRUNK AND RAISING HELL. I STARTED TATTOOING PROFESSIONALLY AROUND 18 OR 19, THAT WAS LIKE 1994, 1995. WOW, NOW I FEEL OLD!

getting run off. He was like a wizard to me, so mysterious.

"Then there were the punk guys I looked up to, like Henry Rollins from Black Flag and Mike Ness from Social Distortion. At that time tattooing was still edgy and not mainstream like it is now."

But even with his underlying curiosity for all things tattoo, it wasn't until about the time he turned 17 that Chambers seriously set his sights on tattooing. Although, admittedly, he wasted no opportunity to learn a few tricks and tips through good ol' fashioned trial and error on willing friends whenever possible, his affinity to art being no surprise considering "all through grade school and high school, art class was always my favorite".

"I don't really remember the first creative spark or the first thing I created, but the earliest memory I have was when I was around six, I had to write a story and make a book out of it [and] I got to draw the cover for it. The book was about a pet deer I had when I was four and five, and it was from that point that I really started to draw and focus on art. Then, when I was eight, I won first place in an art contest with my entire school. So I guess I started really young."

After some time spent "tattooing and messing up my friends", one of Chambers' closest friends, who just so happened to be a tattooer, took the passionate artist under his wing as an apprentice, teaching him the correct approaches to ink.

"There weren't really any sacrifices for me," he says, thinking back. "At that time tattooing was still pretty hardcore. It fitted right into my lifestyle of getting drunk and raising hell. I left home around 15 and started tattooing professionally around 18 or 19, that was like 1994, 1995. Wow… now I feel old," he laughs.

"The first tattoo I did other than stick and poke was a tribal wristband. Honestly, I was too stupid to be afraid, I thought it would be easy. I was wrong. She wanted a tattoo and ended up with scarification. Again, I was too stupid and hard-headed to let that dissuade me from tattooing."

INDUSTRY LOVE/HATE

I love how the industry can pull together for a good cause. Like a tattooer getting injured or sick and everyone pulls together to help them, that's amazing. [But] I'm not big on how closed some people can be with their circles, how tattooers can shun others just because of the style they do or whatever, that's really lame.

Through mistakes come invaluable knowledge, and looking back at it now, Chambers admits, "the best advice I got was to always show confidence and that tattooing isn't a race; to take my time."

With strong roots in traditional Americana, on the surface it would seem Chambers solely tends to gravitate towards the old school style. But although traditional elements are ever-present in his work, Chambers makes it a point to incorporate modern touches, like Princess Leia, who can be spotted in all her glory in one of his latest eye-catching paintings.

"I try to hold to a lot of the traditional rules, but then do my own thing with it. I don't really know how to describe my style,

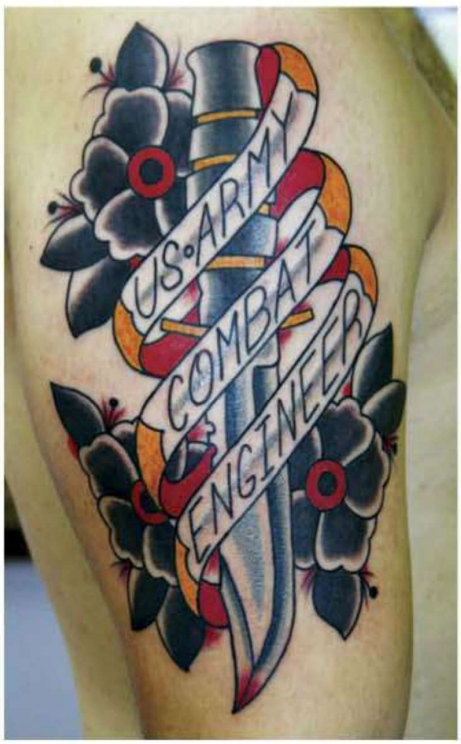
> I DRAW INSPIRATION FROM EVERYWHERE, LIFE, BUT I TRY TO NOT PULL MY INSPIRATION FROM OTHER TATTOOERS TOO MUCH, I REALLY DON'T WANT TO IMITATE ANYONE ELSE

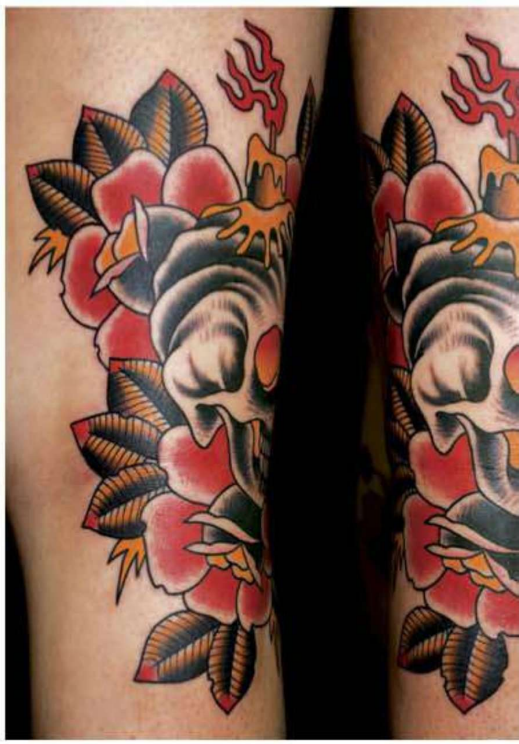
I just do what I feel looks good. I do everything for a reason, but I couldn't really say why.

"I draw inspiration from everywhere, life, but I try to not pull my inspiration from other tattooers too much. I really don't want to imitate anyone else."

When he's not roaming the world – "Next I plan on enjoying life, hopefully I'll finally get to make it over to the UK" – Chambers can be found working out of Art Machine Productions in Philadelphia.

"My friend, Tim Pangburn, who owns Art Machine, invited me out. And I had been wanting to get out of Texas, so I jumped on it. The





vibe there is very positive; he has a great crew there."

And it's not just his peers that make time at work a pleasure, it's also his customers.

"I actually love dealing with the clients. I'm fortunate enough at this point in my career where I only do the things I want and the people that come to me are coming to get a tattoo from me, not just a tattoo. I'm so thankful for that."

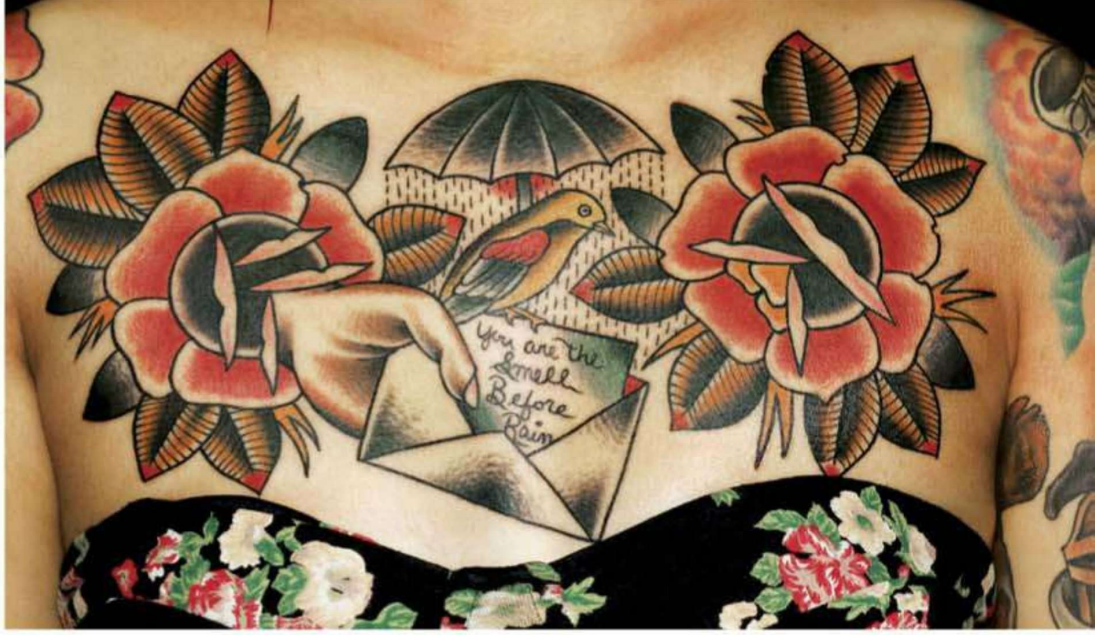
But no matter how pleasant a job may be, doing it day in, day out for years can start to take its toll on even the most passionate and devoted of workers.

"Sometimes it does actually [get dull]. Well, maybe not dull, just draining. Tattooing is very demanding; we have to be constantly motivated, we don't get to have an off day. Right now I'm so booked up I haven't been taking any days off at all, but I just got a house in the mountains in North Carolina with my lady, Mary-Leigh. I plan on cutting back all my tattooing so I can focus on living life and painting. I'm pretty excited about that. I'll be splitting my time between there, Philly and my conventions/ guest spots."

> I GUESS I FEEL WATERCOLOR IS REALLY CLOSE TO TATTOOING. YOU CAN'T MAKE MISTAKES AND IF YOU DO YOU HAVE TO ROLL WITH IT LIKE YOU MEANT TO DO IT!

The painting he so hopes to devote more time to, includes extensive work with watercolours, a medium he started exploring just five years ago and has quickly mastered – he'll even be holding a seminar entitled 'The Basics of Tattoo Flash Style Watercolour' at a number of conventions across the States this year, which, he says, need only be combined with practice and patience to master the craft. Included is information on brushes, canvases, spit shading, staining, and sealing.

"I guess I feel watercolour is really close to tattooing. You can't make mistakes and if you do, you have to roll with it like you meant to do it," laughs Chambers.



Taking a closer look at his personal canvas, you continuously spot one interesting work after another, including Chambers' favorite pieces, "the portrait of my little brother that passed back in 1996 done by my friend, Josh Richey, then there's my full back or turtle shell by my friend David 'Resp' Cheplivouza; it's a traditional Japanese stallion."

But by far, the most intriguing has to be the one you couldn't miss if you tried, the tribal-like design that flows beautifully under his left eye. Now, before you think or say anything, it wasn't just another off-the-cuff, get-it-now-regret-it-later face tattoo decision.

"I got my face tattooed when I was living on the streets as a kid, riding freight trains around the US. The reason I got it is very personal. The basic meaning of it is 'life through truth and honour', but it goes a lot deeper than that.

"If someone wanted me to tattoo their face they would have to already have tattoos on their face and I'd have to agree with what they wanted. I don't usually tattoo faces."

> I'M FORTUNATE ENOUGH AT THIS POINT IN MY CAREER WHERE I ONLY DO THE THINGS I WANT AND THE PEOPLE THAT COME TO ME ARE COMING TO GET A TATTOO FROM ME, NOT JUST A TATTOO

Asked what he hopes to achieve in his career as a tattooer, Myke Chambers casually says "I think I've already done it", which explains why now may finally be an opportune moment for some long overdue R&R, including fewer hours at the shop and less time spent on the convention circuit, even though it has treated him well over the years.

"I started doing conventions to make money and see new places at the same time and then I just got sucked into it, honestly," says Chambers. I don't mind all the noise and I work pretty well in loud, crazy places, so it's not a big deal. I kinda like it at times, I just cut back all of my conventions recently, I just want to relax for a while."

ETERNALLY BOUND

For anyone in the market for a good sketchbook or two, Myke Chambers has released *Eternally Bound Volume 1* and *Volume 2*, each just over 90 pages, spiral bound and exploding with color and black and white images showcasing Chambers' masterful blend of traditional and modern.

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ROLLOCKS TO THIS I'm going home for a wank
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I'd rather be fingering your mum.
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YOU'RE A CUNT
GO CRAZY AND KILL EVERYONE
FRIENDS ARE PEOPLE YOU JUST DON'T WANT TO KILL YET
I'm not arguing, I'm explaining why I am right.
I NEED TO BURN SOME CALORIES SOMEONE GET ME A FAT KID AND A LIGHTER
FUCK OFF
FUCK OFF A BIT MORE
FUCK EVERYTHING AND BECOME A BOUNTY HUNTER
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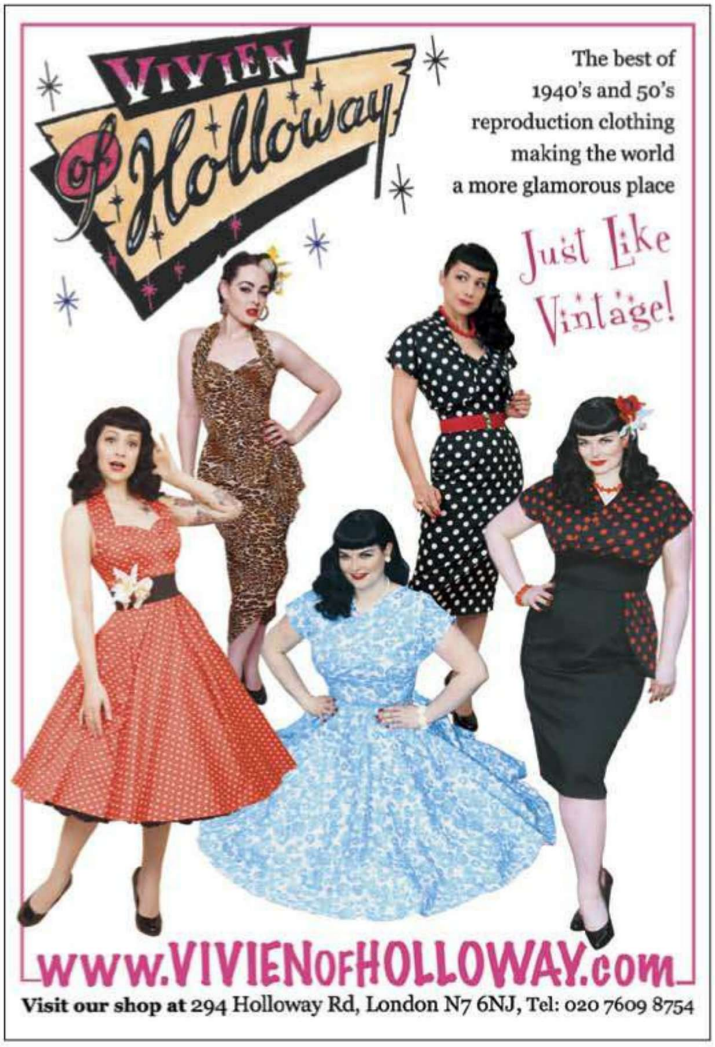
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DanielAcostaDZ.tumblr.com

Coming from a radical evangelical Christian family, passing through *Transformers* and discovering tattooing at the age of 14 in Colombia, a country still not fully open to the art form and oftentimes misunderstood by outsiders, Daniel Acosta León makes for an interesting interview subject to say the least. Brushing up on my Spanish, I dove right in…

WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO START CREATING ART? OVER THE YEARS, DID YOU HAVE ANY ARTISTIC SCHOOLING OR ARE YOU COMPLETELY SELF-TAUGHT?

My mother was a graphic artist and worked for the Banco de la República as a bill designer. When I was born, she left her job to dedicate her time to raising me. When I turned eight, I started graphic design classes in a school in the mornings.

I remember stealing work from her, it was pointillism, and I remember that I really liked it and decided to copy it. Obviously the result was not what I had expected, but apparently everybody thought it was a reason to start pushing me towards art. From that moment on, I attended some drawing and painting workshops, some music as well, but nothing really serious. Graduating from school, I studied at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia for a year, then abandoned it to start tattooing.

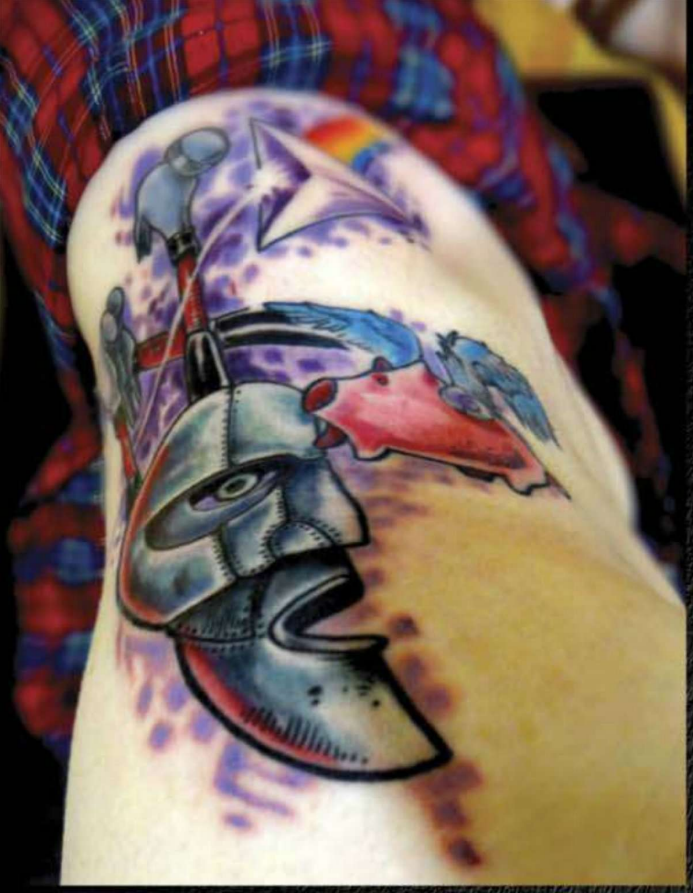
Barbara Pavone ✪ Daniel Acosta Leon

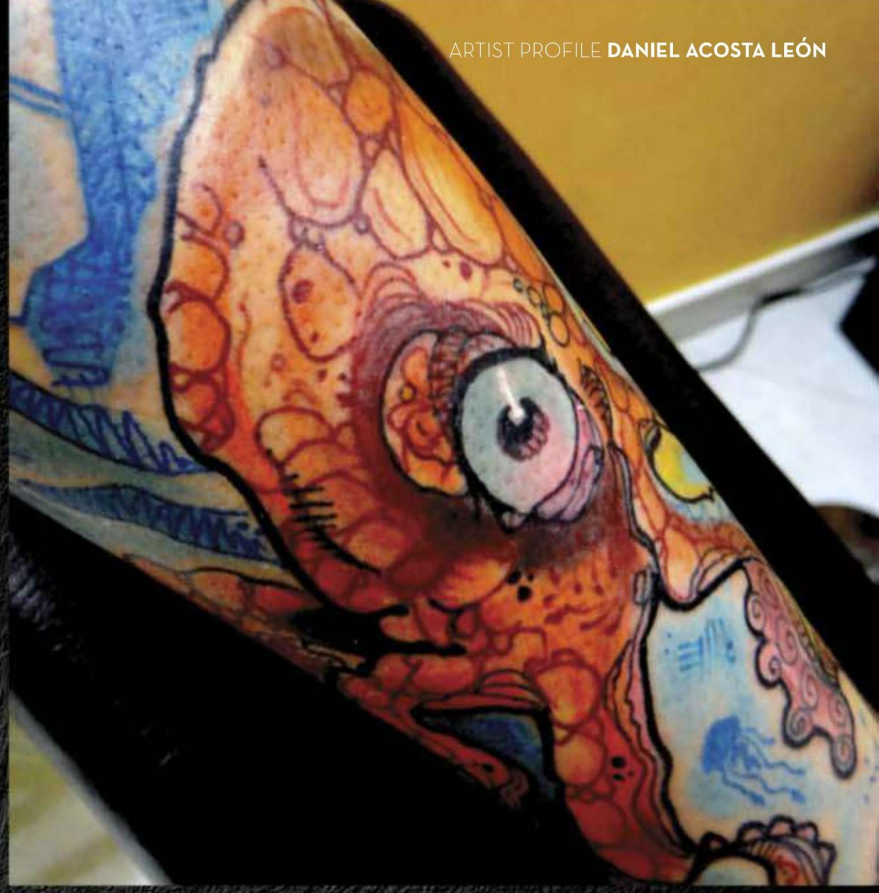
WHAT WAS THE FIRST EVER PIECE OF ART YOU CREATED?

I don't remember the first drawing I did, but what I do remember really well is a Transformers notebook I had. It had Optimus Prime on the cover and many color drawings from when I was around five years old. I don't know what happened to that notebook. I saw it once or twice, a family member had saved it, and after that it disappeared again.

WHAT SPARKED YOUR LOVE FOR TATTOOING?

It all happened at school. When I was 14, I got my first tattoo. We took images from a picture book one Friday after school, and along with two other friends, we got tattooed. From the age of 14 to 18 I visited that same shop at least 12 times. I had a very addictive start with tattoos.

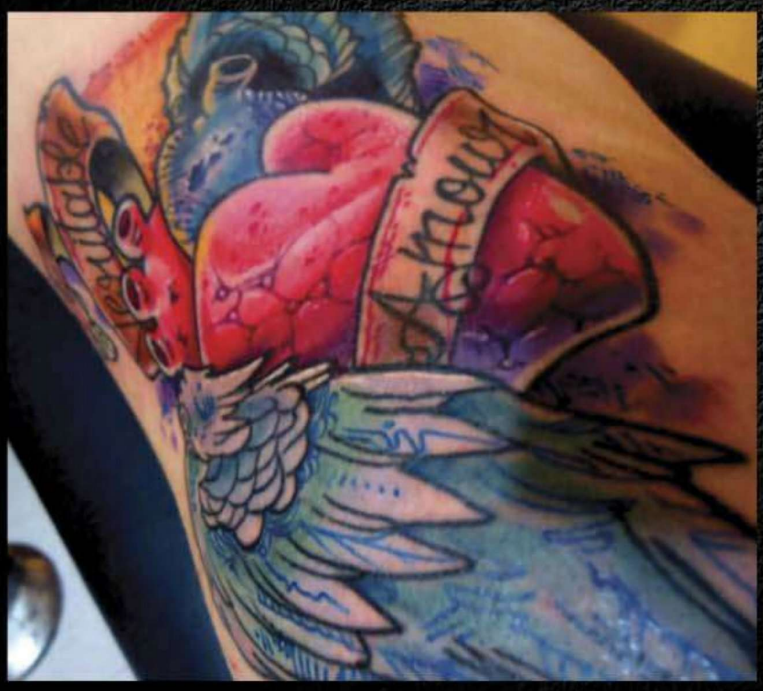




WAS AN APPRENTICESHIP PART OF YOUR LEARNING PROCESS? WHERE DOES YOUR KNOWLEDGE COME FROM?
Starting out was quite difficult. It wasn't like the new tattooers that pay for classes and in two weeks are already 'tattooers'. I had to be an apprentice and assistant in various shops before I could tattoo anyone, that took about two years, and afterwards I could tattoo my first pieces, which obviously were disastrous. At that time, the level in my country wasn't very high, therefore, I didn't really have anyone to learn from... all in all, it is a constant battle of love and hate.

> I HAD A HOUSE, A FAMILY, I WAS IN ONE OF THE BEST UNIVERSITIES IN THE COUNTRY, MY LIFE WAS QUITE COMFORTABLE AND I HAD FAMILY SUPPORT

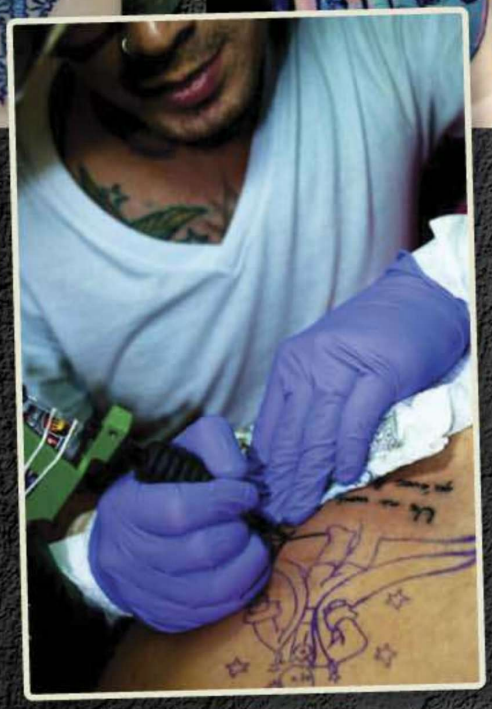
DID YOU HAVE TO MAKE ANY MAJOR SACRIFICES TO PURSUE TATTOOING AS A CAREER?
Truthfully, the mere fact of wanting to tattoo changed my whole life. I had a house, a family, I was in one of the best universities in the country; my life was quite comfortable and I had family support. The moment I decided to start tattooing, everything disappeared; house, money, help, family. I literally started from nothing just to accomplish my goal of being a tattooer. Nowadays, after several years, things are a bit better, but it was a pretty hard start.



WHAT WAS THE FIRST TATTOO YOU DID AND HOW DID YOU FEEL ABOUT THE WHOLE EXPERIENCE?
It was a tribal around an existing fairy. I did it on a friend. It wasn't bad, it could have been worse!

HOW DID YOUR FAMILY AND FRIENDS REACT TO YOU GETTING TATTOOED AND CHOOSING TO TATTOO FULL-TIME?
My family is radical evangelical Christians and my friends at the time were conservative kids that came from conservative families. Being a tattooer created a gap between me and many of the people who made up my social nucleus. My life literally changed completely when I

OTHER MEDIUMS
I've always liked working with aqueous media i.e. acrylics, vinyl and watercolors. For several years they were the ones that helped me with study and experimentation thanks to their color and application. I am currently exploring oil, it's very different in many ways, thus allowing me to experiment and learn new concepts.



> THE MOMENT I DECIDED TO START TATTOOING, EVERYTHING DISAPPEARED: HOUSE, MONEY, HELP, FAMILY. I LITERALLY STARTED FROM NOTHING JUST TO ACCOMPLISH MY GOAL OF BEING A TATTOOER

started tattooing. There are very few people from that time who I still have any sort of contact with.

TELL ME ABOUT YOUR VERY INTERESTING AND VERY SPECIAL PROJECT, LA DUQUESA COLECTIVO...

It started two years ago when my fiancée, Diana Mora, and I wanted to have a multi-disciplinary space where different artists could get together and display different innovative, cutting-edge approaches.

When we opened, we had two stylists, my fiancée took care of administration and industrial design, and I took care of visual arts and tattoos. After that, we were joined by a graphic artist and a few months later two filmmakers joined our team. The last two additions were a new tattooer and a publicist, and we hope to continue growing.

WHAT ARE THE GOALS OF LA DUQUESA COLECTIVO?

We want to create a new vision for tattooing, art and aesthetics in this city and in Colombia. Making it more accessible to the whole world so that it stops being a taboo and becomes a culture and way of life, so that everyone will understand that our appearance does not define us as individuals, but as individuals we define our appearance.

WHAT IS TATTOO CULTURE LIKE IN COLOMBIA?

In Colombia, everything is very relative. We have an extremely rich cultural mix in many areas and tattooing is very influential in cities like Bogota, Medellin and Cali. Many people are tattooed and those who are not are very respectful and oftentimes have admiration for the practice, regardless of age. On the other hand, in smaller cities like the one we live in, things are much more difficult, people are just beginning to understand tattooing as an art form or culture and for many, the concept of prisoners, criminals and prostitutes is still very implicit.

But overall, Colombia may become an international powerhouse in tattooing in just a few years. Remember me when Colombian artists are invading every city and we are on the front pages of magazines. [laughs]

WHAT'S BEEN ONE OF YOUR MOST MEMORABLE CLIENT STORIES TO DATE?

I remember a long time ago, a cover up I had to do on an arm. It was an Indian with red skin that was tattooed as if in prison; it was done by the client's mother

MEANINGFUL INK

The most special are the one on my chest that I did in honour of my mother, who died when I was a kid, and the one on my right forearm that I got for Diana, my love.

as punishment for having failed a school year. This lady tattooed her own son so he would remember his failure his entire life! [laughs]

IF YOU COULD CHANGE ONE THING ABOUT THE TATTOO INDUSTRY IN SOUTH AMERICA, WHAT WOULD THAT BE?
Talking about South America in general is very generic, every country and every region has its idiosyncrasies and specific situations. In the case of Argentina or Brazil, tattoo culture is extremely developed, not only as a social movement, but also as an industry and commerce, unlike my country, Colombia, in which it is still a relatively young movement.

What we are missing are the inputs; we have very limited materials, we have to import them from the United States or from other countries and hope that, with luck, suppliers will bring materials with which it's possible to work.

IF YOU HAD TO GIVE UP TATTOOING AND TRY A DIFFERENT PROFESSION, WHAT WOULD YOU CHOOSE? COULD YOU SEE YOURSELF DOING ANYTHING ELSE?
This is something I've thought about many times. I really like painting and am currently taking lessons with one of the most important masters that this country has, Jorge Mantilla Caballero. Thinking about the possibility of living from art on canvas is interesting.

> I REMEMBER A LONG TIME AGO A COVER UP I HAD TO DO ON AN ARM. IT WAS AN INDIAN WITH RED SKIN THAT WAS TATTOOED AS IF IN PRISON; IT WAS DONE BY THE CLIENT'S MOTHER AS PUNISHMENT FOR HAVING FAILED A SCHOOL YEAR

And I also really like cooking. I love it a lot, actually. Thinking about being a chef doesn't displease me at all.

WHAT'S THE GREATEST MISCONCEPTION PEOPLE HAVE ABOUT COLOMBIA, AND WHAT IS THE ONE THING THEY SHOULD ABSOLUTELY KNOW?
As a first point, we are Colombia, not Columbia. Colombia is a beautiful country in South America. Columbia is the district to which the city of Washington belongs.

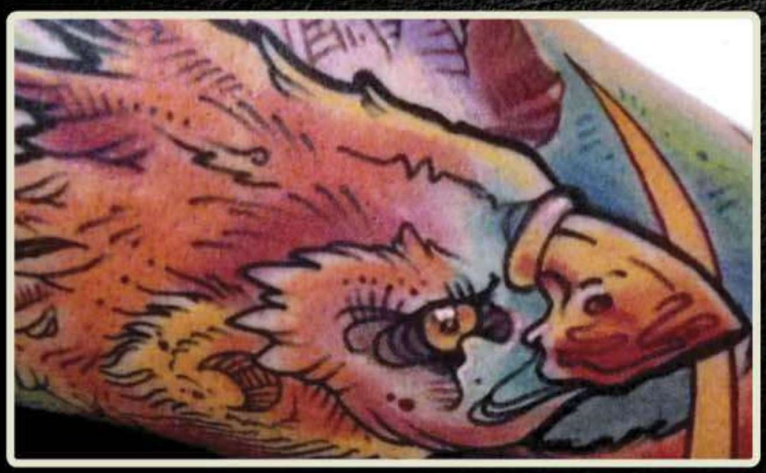
Secondly, not every Colombian is a dealer or is related to the world of drug trafficking or violence. It is unfair to label a people for what a few misfits do.

Thirdly, it is not a violent country nor in permanent war. There is civil conflict, but it is not like it's shown by the news media or press in other countries.

Colombia is one of the most beautiful countries in the world. We have two oceans, a part of the Amazon, people are friendly and attentive, and it is an ideal country for every type of tourist. If they like backpacking, it has amazing areas to visit like no other country can offer. If [they] are a bit more demanding with regards to comfort, we have hotels and resorts of the highest quality in magical places like San Andres and Providencia. Colombia is much more than what people around the world believe it is.

ONE MORE THEN YOU'RE FREE! FINISH THIS SENTENCE: DANIEL ACOSTA LEÓN IS...
Always learning.

COLOMBIAN TRENDS
We are currently undergoing a strong revival of old school, like the rest of the world, and traditional in all its variations is the most popular at this time. Obviously, due to its geo-political position, our country is greatly influenced by the United States and its influence on art and style with respect to tattooing is notorious. There is also a big, excellent school of hyperrealist tattooers.



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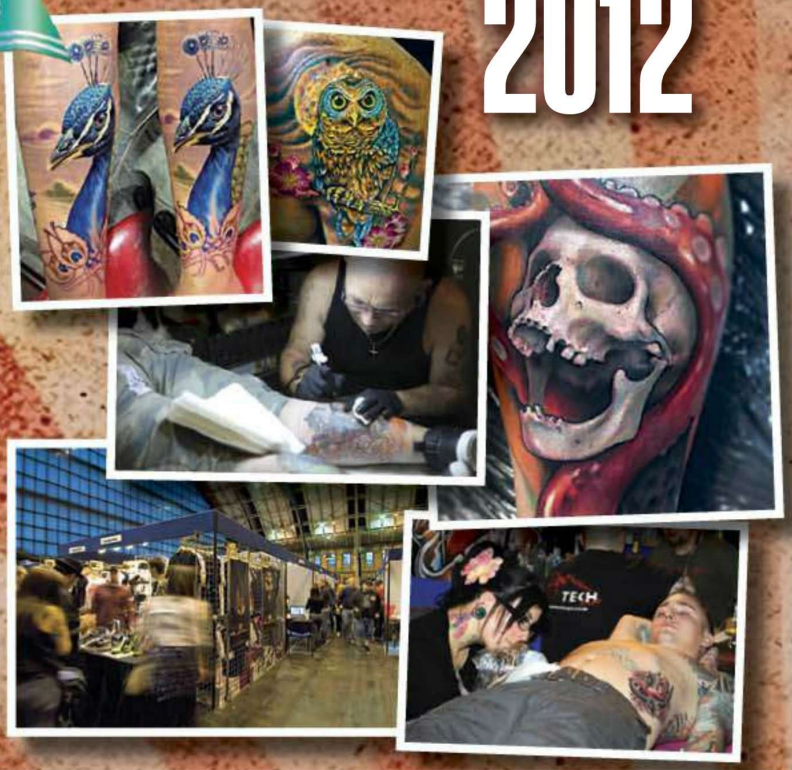

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Andy DeBlasio
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Pauly Lavey
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Tracy Demetriou
Kobay Kronik
Brad Edwards
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Darren Wright
Louis Molloy
Tommi Crazy
Rachel Baldwin
Amy Kinsell
Jo Harrison
Carlie B
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Craigy Lee
Rae Pinx
Kostas Baronis
Mac McCarthy
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TATTOOFEST KRAKÓW

I always wanted to visit this tattoo convention. I've heard so many good things about this event, but unfortunately something always came up and I couldn't go

This year however, after talking to organizers, whom I have now met many times at various European conventions and who are great, passionate people, I decided to book my flight right away and put this event into my calendar. One thing you need to know about my diary… once something goes in there, it's pretty much final. I was particularly happy about this festival and was looking forward to it for many reasons, but mainly because I've never been to a Polish convention before! After checking out the artist list, which looked very promising, and doing some research about Kraków itself… well, I couldn't think of a better place to start my Polish tattoo adventure.

I arrived in Kraków on Friday night, after a rather informative taxi ride from the airport to my friends place. And for raising my awareness about the poor social and economic infrastructure here, it felt good to give the driver a nice tip before turning my mind to the event I was excitedly anticipating.

I was staying in a flat in an old townhouse nearby most of Kraków's tourist attractions. Within walking distance to Wawel, I hadn't planned or had time to sightsee, but somehow I got lost and found myself walking around a beautiful castle. Lifts aren't very popular in Kraków, and stairs are long and high so it was a nice workout before the busy weekend – and believe me when I say it was a very busy weekend indeed.

The building might not be very appealing from the outside, but even a huge grey box can be exciting when it's filled with some incredible artworks and such a great positive vibe. Through the doors I immediately noticed Jess Yen working on a backpiece. Then there was Kult Crew; Kult is a local, but worldwide known tattoo shop based in Kraków… do the names Davee and Edek ring a bell? Well, they should because those guys are travelling the world showing off their amazing skills.

Aga Hairesis

TATTOO CONTEST RESULTS

FEMALE COMPOSITION
1ST PLACE
David Rudziński
Theatrum Symbolica
2ND PLACE
Bartosz Panas
Caffeine Tattoo, Warszawa

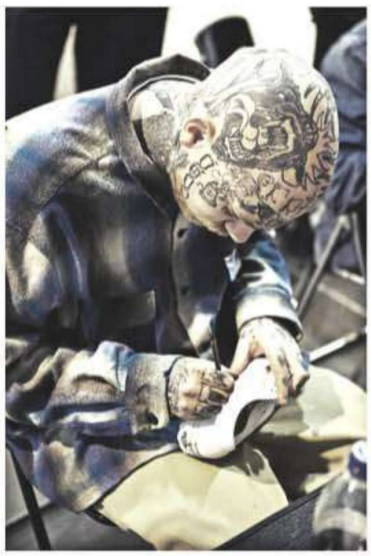
LARGE COMPOSITION
1ST PLACE
Bartosz Panas
Caffeine Tattoo, Warszawa
model: Łukasz
2ND PLACE
Tofi
Ink-Ognito Rybnik

OLD SCHOOL NEW SCHOOL
1ST PLACE
Marcin Surowiec
Małpy w Cykru/ On the road
2ND PLACE
Jacob Pedersen
Crooked Moon Tattoo, Szwecja

INDIVIDUAL
1ST PLACE
David Rudziński
Theatrum Symbolica Warszawa
2ND PLACE
Kosa, Art Line Rybnik

Right from the beginning there was VANS Authentic painting going on at the stage. Artists: Davee, Edek, Marcin Surowiec, Fishero, Bartosz Panas, Hakan, Ed Perdomo, Saxe, Victor Portugal, Adriaan Machete, Anders Aagesen, Bam, Lehel Nyestewere, and even Boog himself, were transferring their skills onto the white fabric kindly donated by Vans of their most iconic shoes, which were later auctioned with all the money going to Kraków Zoological Garden.

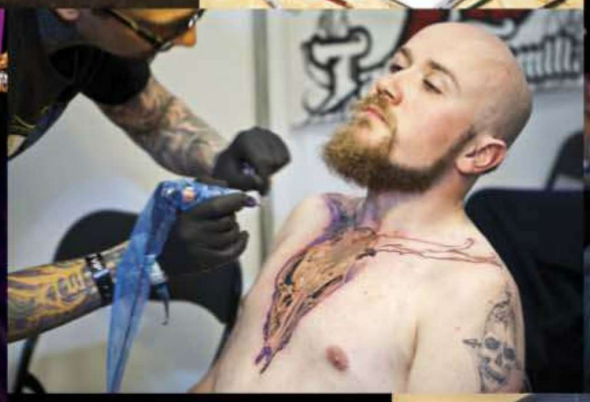
> THE PROGRAM WAS FULLY PACKED WITH PERFORMANCES AND FASHION SHOWS. VERY INTERESTING ENTERTAINMENT, THERE WAS MOST CERTAINLY SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

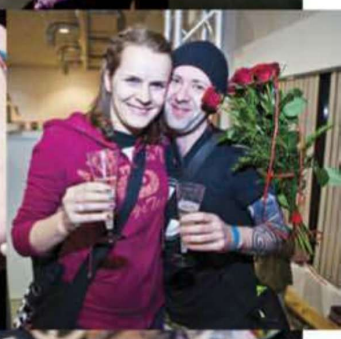


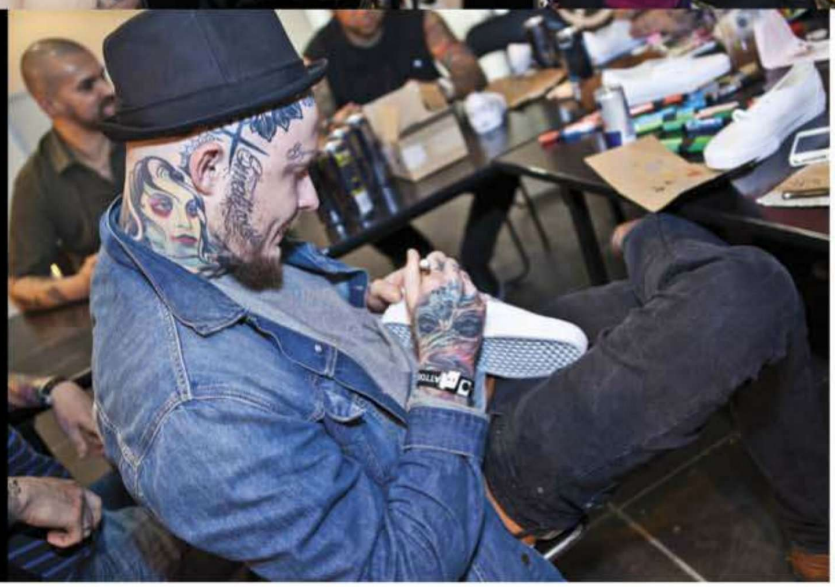
The program was fully packed with performances and fashion shows; very interesting entertainment, there was most certainly something for everyone. I must say it was pretty crowded in front of the stage most of the time, which I think speaks for itself.

SATURDAY

KWADRON

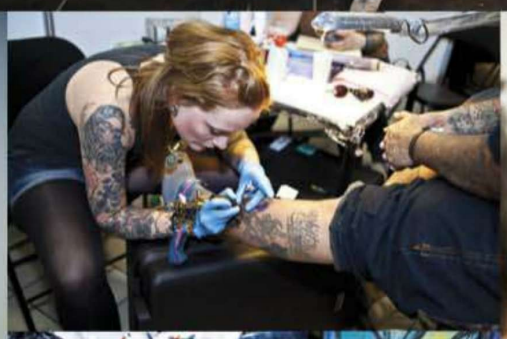






SUNDAY

BANG!



piece. Randy works at German studio, Heaven of Colours… I won't be exaggerating saying that the name of his studio perfectly reflects what his tattoos are like. There were also stunning sleeves by Tofi and big pieces by Bartosz Panas, presenting both of these artists mastered paint-style skills. I could talk for hours about particular pieces, but I won't do that unless Skin Deep is turning into a book…

I need to add here that I felt truly sorry for the jury. They had many tough decisions to make. I wouldn't have liked to be in their shoes.

In between the contests were the Grotesque Singer act and TRASH Brand – clothing fashion show. Then after announcing the best of the day tattoo winner, the stage was taken over by the legendary Superfly Suspension crew from Berlin along with special guest, Coco Katsura, from Japan. I had the great pleasure to watch their professional suspension and bondage show last year on a much bigger stage. One thing I realized watching them in Kraków… big stage, or small – doesn't matter at all in their case because they'll still leave you speechless and wide eyed regardless of the space they have to play with.

After this day packed with entertainment and the tattoo machine buzz still going on in our ears, we went to the afterparty at the Hard Rock Cafe in the heart of Kraków. Sitting outside at the famous Market Square, enjoying the great weather, chatting with newly met and old friends – what a perfect end to a great day.

BEST OF SATURDAY
1ST PLACE
Paweł Gawkowski
Panteon, Białystok
2ND PLACE
Nick Morte
Lucky 7, Norwegia

SMALL COLOUR
1ST PLACE
Sławek Myśków
Nautilus, Wrocław
2ND PLACE
Kosa
Art Line, Rybnik

BIG COLOUR
1ST PLACE
Tofi
Ink-Ognito, Rybnik
2ND PLACE
Bartosz Panas
Caffeine Tattoo

First competition of Saturday, check this out now… The Ugliest Tattoo Contest. A very popular category, very well received by the public and such an ice breaker for everyone. What a great, fun way to start the competitive part of the event! Then to calm everyone down after what was an emotional contest, we were given an insight into the braids world by alternative hair studio, Cococabana. If you thought that you can do anything with ink and skin these days, you were right! And clearly this also applies to hair – the Cocacabana girls have huge imaginations and the skill to match.

After the show, the evening became very busy with the competitions, and that's where the serious business started. I knew before going to Kraków to expect to see lots of great quality tattoos given the high caliber of artists invited… but what I saw exceeded all my expectations (*mine too! Ed.*) I'm used to going to conventions where 50 or 60 percent of the tattoos entered are alright, awesome, even breathtaking, leaving a huge percentage of works that aren't, to say the least, 'masterpieces'. But here in Kraków, most of the works were stunning and exceptionally well executed. Taking photos backstage was never busier.

Two artists especially caught my eye: Silvia Pretto and her female portraits – I simply love her great choice of colors and attention to detail; and I can say exactly the same about Randy Engelhard's

AFTER THE SHOW, THE EVENING BECAME VERY BUSY WITH THE COMPETITIONS AND THAT'S WHERE THE SERIOUS BUSINESS STARTED

TATTOO ART FROM THE SHOW CAN BE FOUND IN THIS ISSUE'S SUPPLEMENT WITH THE FULL HIT APPEARING IN SKIN SHOTS ISSUE 82

DAY TWO

When I realized the day before was so busy that I hadn't even had the chance to attend seminars and have a proper look from booth to booth to see what's going on under the needles – that's when the craziness started. Short day, so

much to see and so many people I wanted to talk to.

I almost didn't notice the Banana Ink booth. Such an amazing opportunity for anyone who would like to see what the work of the tattoo artist looks like and it's not every day you get the chance to ink a banana under the watchful eye of professionals. Running between the contests, shooting some lovely girls in latex and taking pictures of the artists at work made my day fly by too quickly.

The grey building that I mentioned earlier was surrounded more and more by colorful graffiti along the theme of Genetically Modified Organism (GMO). Darek Paczkowski, street artist and the guy responsible for this fun and very informative activity, highlighted that GMO is not a problem only for agriculturists, but also inhabitants of bigger cities. Many people associate GMO only with a thing that is dangerous to health, but Darek wants you to sit up and know that it also causes huge environmental, economic and social disasters.

SUCH AN AMAZING OPPORTUNITY FOR ANYONE WHO WOULD LIKE TO SEE WHAT THE WORK OF THE TATTOO ARTIST LOOKS LIKE, AND IT'S NOT EVERY DAY YOU GET THE CHANCE TO INK A BANANA UNDER WATCHFUL EYE OF PROFESSIONALS

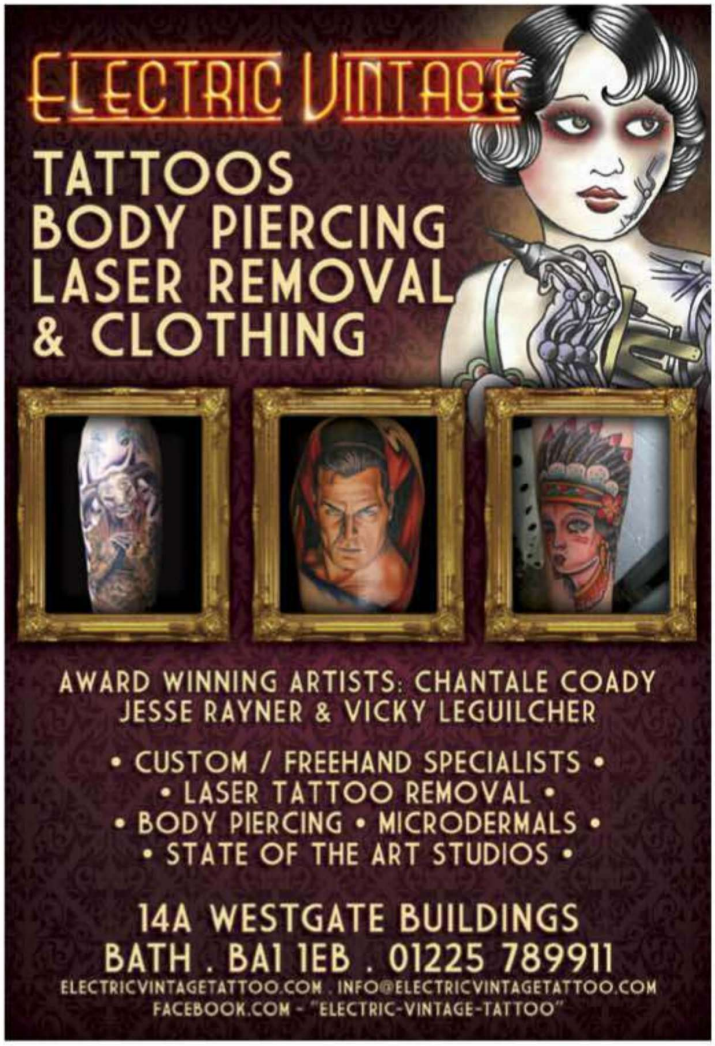
It was a real pleasure to visit Kraków for Tattoofest and to see so many familiar faces as well as meet some great people from around the world. My sincere congratulations to the organizers for putting such a great event together. They thought of everything, but no surprise there given that I see Radek, Ola and Krysia at many European tattoo conventions. They're professionals who have been in the tattoo industry for many years and they're also tattoo collectors themselves. They're the kind of people I love being surrounded by – people passionate about what they do who somehow manage to make this a wonderful, friendly, fun and homely atmosphere. Well done Tattoofest crew for making this event so special for everyone.

See you in Kraków in 2013 for the 8th edition of Tattoofest… missing you already!

SMALL BLACK GREY
1ST PLACE
Elmo
Straight Line Tattoo
Nowy Targ
2ND PLACE
Jarek
Rock Tattoo, Opole

LARGE BLACK GREY
I Lars Uwe
Loxodrom Tattoo
Berlin, Niemcy &
Noon, Boucherie
Traditionnelle,
Francja
2ND PLACE
AgRypa, 9th Circle,
Kraków

BEST OF SUNDAY
1ST PLACE
Arek
Jokers Tattoo,
Ostrów Wielkopolski
2ND PLACE
Dzikson
Kraków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All work shown here has been done by Przemyslaw (Shamack) Malachowski

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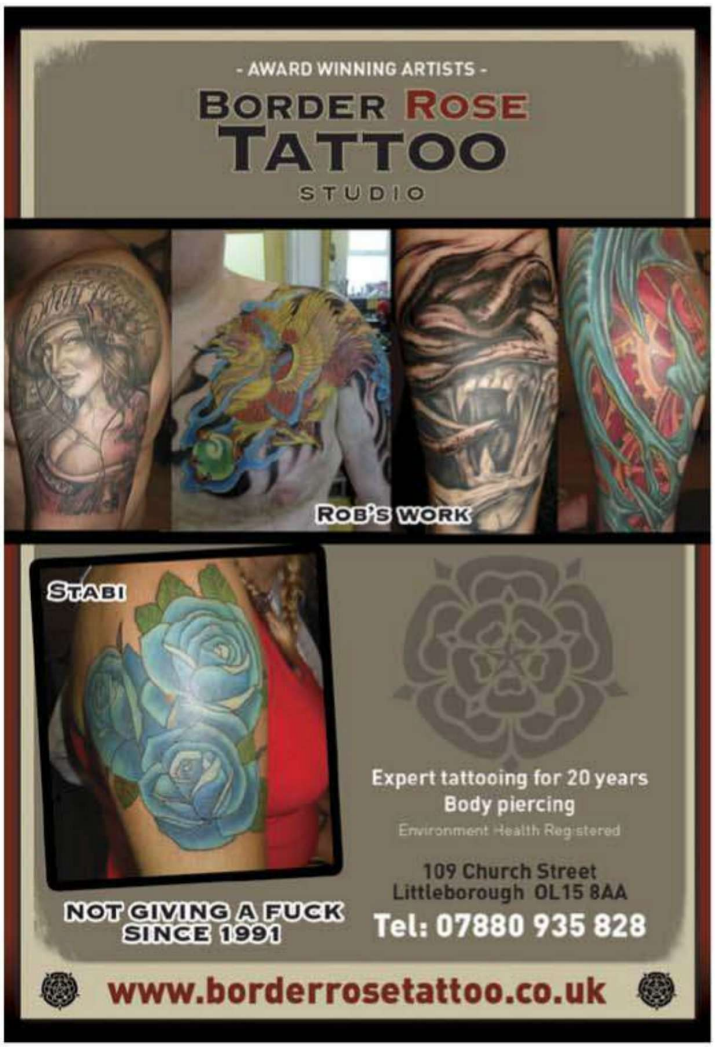
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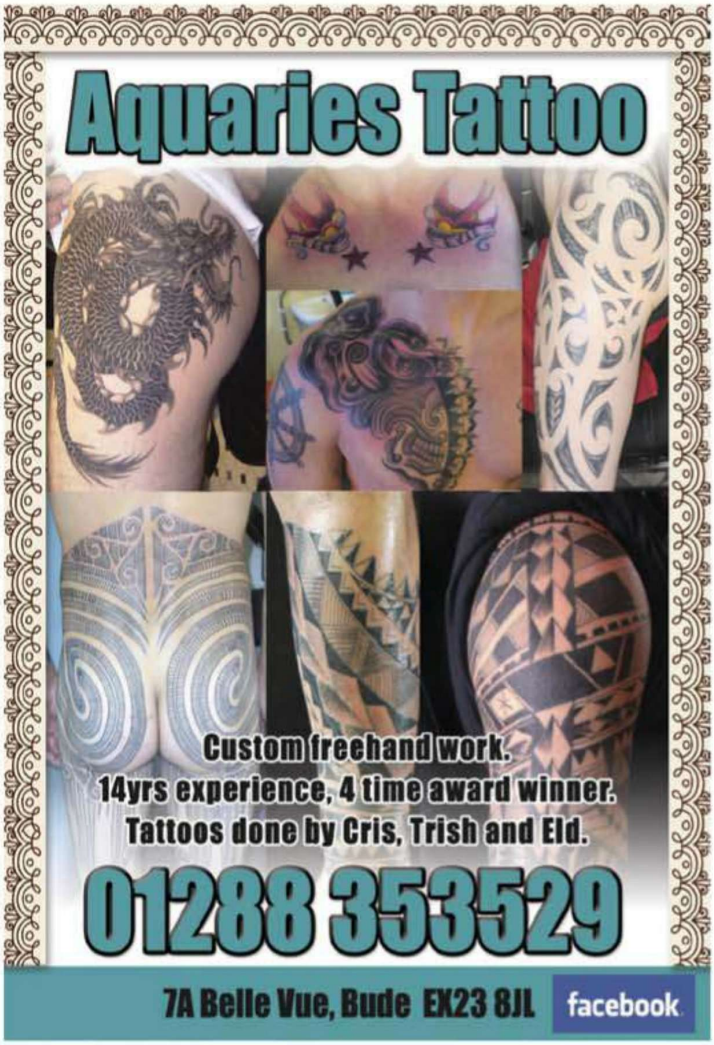

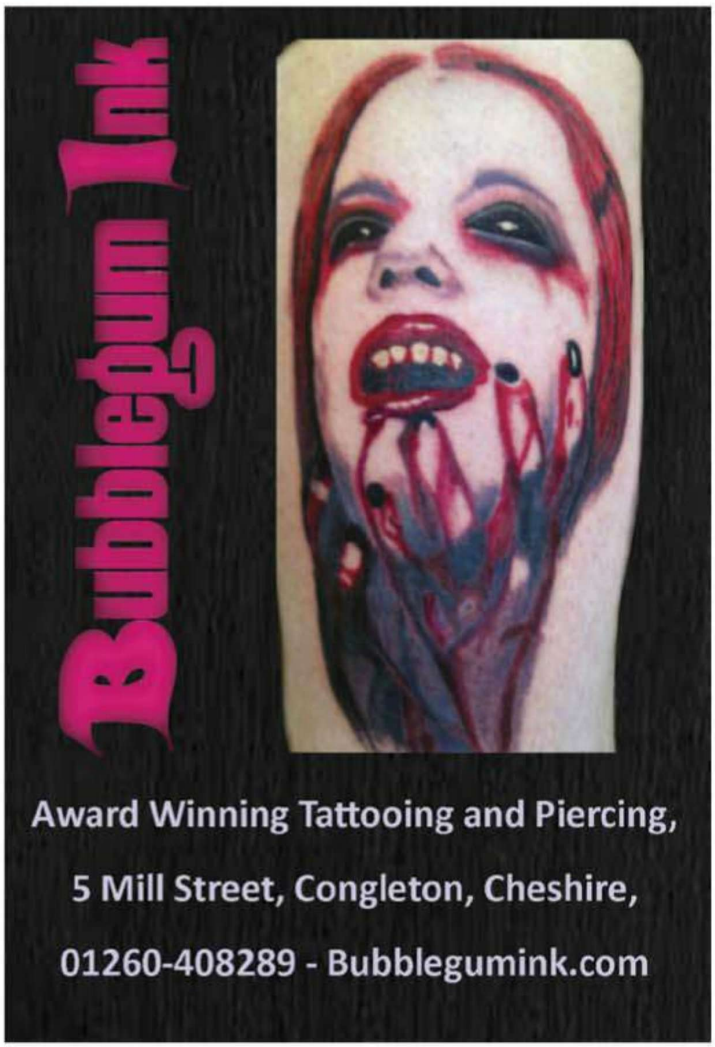

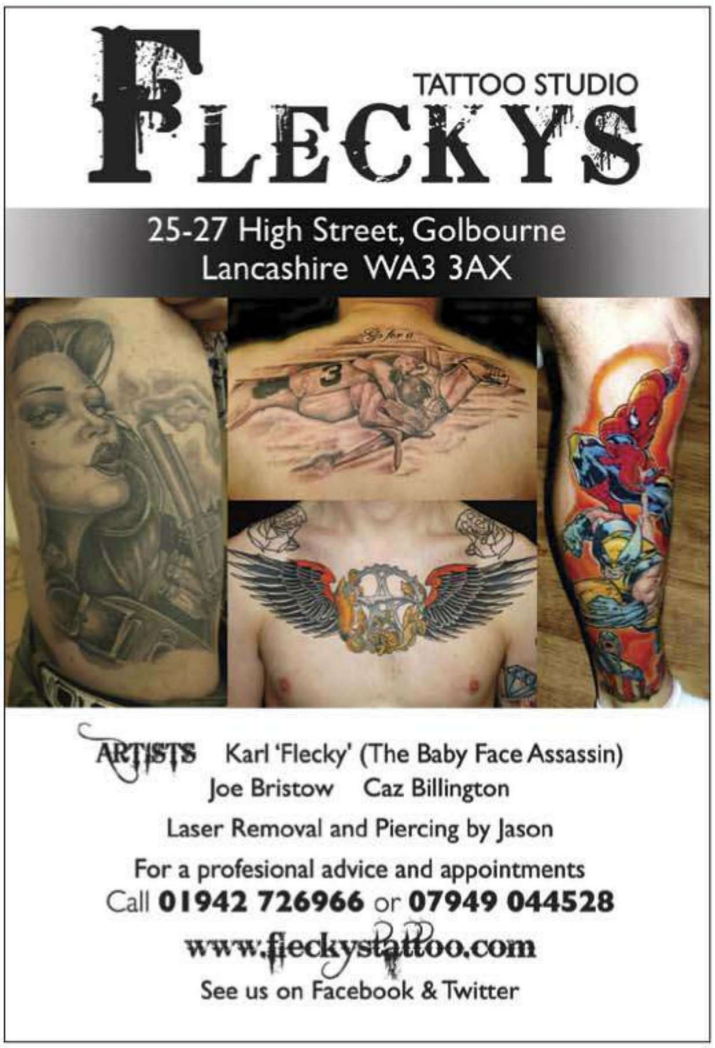

www.distortionoflife.com

OPTICON ILLUSION

When you're Rask Opticon and you've dedicated the better part of the last 25 years to creating art, it should be no surprise that after conquering everything else, the natural progression of canvas would lead you to flesh...

With the ever-growing street art and pop culture movements currently making waves across North America, particularly in California, it has become an incredibly daunting task to make a name for yourself and find that niche which art fans will immediately recognize as yours. And far too often, stellar artists get lost in a constantly evolving scene saturated with by an overambitious community, which should only enhance the admiration for what 33-year-old Rask Opticon has achieved.

Having honed his craft on practically every manmade canvas and within almost every artistic style, from acrylic to airbrush, digital to spray paint and even sculpting, Opticon recently reached an epiphany – he was ready to conquer an entirely different canvas... human skin.

As of now, his experience within the confines of human tissue is still fairly green, but he is hoping that years of experience perfecting his own unique styles will translate into success, even though the texture is unlike any that he has ever worked with. Thus, we figured it would be mighty interesting to see how one as accomplished in the art field (non-arguable point) was faring in making this transition to skin.

In fact, it was his unique style that initially lured me in, making me jump at the chance to have a little bit of that uniqueness etched into my skin and contribute a little something to the ever-advancing skills of a legend in the art world who by his own admission, is something of a virgin in the tattoo world.

His confidence is evident, but nowhere close to arrogant, and is a trait best explained by Opticon's lifetime commitment to perfection. Art has been a prevalent part of his life for as long as he can remember and he is living proof that a little encouragement goes a long way.

"I've been doing art since I was in the second grade. I used to get a lot of awards from my teachers, so I kinda figured 'I guess I'm pretty good at this'. I've been drawing ever since."

It wasn't just his teachers that took notice, but as a sort of prelude for things to come it was his fellow students and their incessant demands for his drawings that really made him aware of his artistic potential. However it wasn't until he discovered graffiti that he began to realize how deep his appreciation for art really was. Growing up in the predominately Hispanic community of Paramount – a neighboring suburb of Compton that's perhaps best known for being the birthplace of the Zamboni of all things – tagging was a normalcy, with authorities having more pressing matters than a little wall desecration.

"Back then there was, like, no police department... I used to live

BY THE BOOK

Opticon's first foray into the world of published accolades came in 2011 when he graced the pages of *Lowrider Arte Magazine*. "They told me six [pages] and it ended up being ten. And a lot of people [started] adding me on Facebook like crazy and they were like, 'Dude, I've been collecting this magazine forever and when you were in it that was my favorite mag'." Shortly after, acclaimed author and photo-journalist, Edgar OSOK Hoill, included four different Rask Opticon pieces in his book, *Latino Art Collection: Tattoo-Inspired Chicano, Maya, Aztec and Mexican Styles*.

I USED TO LIVE ON THIS STREET WHERE ON THE CORNER WAS THE PUBLIC SCHOOL AND IN BROAD DAYLIGHT THE GANGS WOULD JUST COME IN WITH BOLT CUTTERS AND JUST CUT THE CHAINS AND TAKE OVER THE CORNER

Seth Fischer Opticon

on this street where on the corner [was] the public school, and in broad daylight the gangs would just come in with bolt cutters and just cut the chains and take over the corner," Opticon reminisces with a smirk. "There'd be graffiti all over the place and I was liking the whole big block letters of graffiti. And having a nickname, almost kinda like a super villain type of deal, you got a nickname and everyone knows who you are."

As he got older, other influences began to seep into his art, which remain prominent in what he creates today. "I'm a huge, huge video game fan. Atari, Nintendo, Super Nintendo, I was a big role playing game geek, man, strategy games… especially the Super Mario games 'cause of the colors and all that. I like vivid colors, crazy characters, you know, like the turtles with the wings flying around."

It came as no surprise then that when he concocted the design for my tattoo, it was focused on the old Nintendo game, Bubble Bobble. As an old school gamer myself, I was stoked at such a fantastically random idea.

As far as particular artists that have had a profound effect on him, Opticon was quick to answer. "Michael Hussar," he blurts out without hesitation. "I like his art; it's dark, especially the way he does the eyes when he does portraits. He's definitely one of my favorite artists. Those eyes, they were dark and sad and you can tell, like, something's going on in his head."

While a vast majority of artists tend to drop the anchor around the art mediums they're most comfortable with, Opticon has never been one to rest on his laurels, continually expanding his walls and opening new doors, so it was only a matter of time before man became the canvas. And, not unlike how his teachers used to encourage his artistic side back in the second grade, this time, positive reinforcement came from within the tattoo community.

"A lot of people tried to get me into that scene maybe five or six years ago. I met a bunch of tattoo artists, they looked at my work [and] they're like 'You're not doing tattoos, bro?' I never even thought about it." And, like his classmates back then, the encouragement came with ulterior motives. "They wanted me to get good so I could tattoo them," he laughs.

So he began experimenting with practice skin, understanding the unique texture along with the repercussions of working with human flesh as opposed to paper or plastic. And he spent a considerable amount of time watching YouTube videos and lurking on tattoo forums and message boards in order to get a good idea as to what to expect.

It wasn't long before he was ready to try, tattooing a Decepticon logo on the calf of a close friend about four years ago. "He was the one bugging me [to start tattooing]. It was pretty painful for him, but for the first time ever my lines were straight and clean. It was just gonna be an outline, no filling; that's a whole different needle and you can only go over the skin so many times, so it worked out fine."

While most of this information was given to me just before I was about to become Test Subject Number Eight, I refused to be deterred, committed to seeing just how far he's come with tattooing in such a short period of time. So with his mentor, AR, watching over his every move, making sure to

MICHAEL HUSSAR
Michael Hussar is an American artist from southern California who specialises in oil paintings using modern masters' techniques. Considered to be one of the pioneers of the thriving alternative art movement, Hussar spent nearly ten years teaching portrait painting at the Art Center College of Design before notoriety came. Sometimes controversial due to their provocative and intensely realistic nature, Hussar's works have been featured in magazines and are part of the private collections of celebrity art enthusiasts Warren Beatty and Francis Ford Coppola, among others. Recently, Hussar released a book entitled *White*, detailing the last ten years of his illustrious career.

I MET A BUNCH OF TATTOO ARTISTS, THEY LOOKED AT MY WORK AND THEY'RE LIKE 'YOU'RE NOT DOING TATTOOS, BRO?' I NEVER EVEN THOUGHT ABOUT IT

point out and correct Opticon where his inexperience got the better of him, there is no doubt that Opticon is a tattoo star in the making. With a slow, methodical approach, he remained as meticulous and self-assured as any tattoo artist 30 years his senior.

Having done just a handful as of now, he is in no rush to start putting his own unique brand of art onto others despite the high demand. "A lot of people ask me, but I'm nowhere near that level." Opticon's concerns regarding fans expecting the same level of quality with his tattoos as with his other art are both warranted and justified, and why he refuses to budge until he's confident he's ready. "I don't wanna get a rep like, 'Oh, man, who did your tattoo? Rask? He did this?' and they'll look at my work and then look at my other work and be like 'Oh wow!' I don't want that rep, so for now, it's just baby steps."

But once he decides to start, he'll make sure the world knows. "When I'm ready, I'll make the announcement, but until then I'll only tattoo people that I know personally and who know where I'm at and what level."

In the meantime, Opticon will continue to build up his portfolio in the art world and do what he can to not get typecast as just another tattoo artist. To help him keep things in perspective, about a year-and-a-half ago, he joined forces with fellow art enthusiasts AR, Mario and the rest of Ink Bombers, a tight-knit varied collection of artists located in and around the San Gabriel Valley.

Created in 2007, the familial collective has become a mainstay in the art community, establishing itself in various art forms from painting to digital to tattoo. "AR, my mentor in tattoos, he's the one that started it a few years ago. And when I came into the scene a year-and-a-half ago, we were talking about doing an art show and were like, 'We should do art shows with themes', so people would be excited about it."

As of now, the group has just completed their fourth show with subjects ranging from Disney – for which Rask created his acclaimed Little Mermaid and Dumbo pieces – to the most recent exhibit which pays tribute to Alice in Wonderland.

> WHEN I'M READY, I'LL MAKE THE ANNOUNCEMENT, BUT UNTIL THEN I'LL ONLY TATTOO PEOPLE THAT I KNOW PERSONALLY AND WHO KNOW WHERE I'M AT AND WHAT LEVEL

Opticon is also looking to get back to his roots and recommence his love affair with more traditional street art, a style galleries have come to embrace in more recent years. A shift that makes Opticon exclaim, "Where the hell were you guys back in the day?"

And he's also yearning to dabble in music. Or more specifically, hard trance and industrial, an endeavor that's unfortunately too time consuming for his hectic schedule.

But art is his first love and there's nothing more he would enjoy than continuing on with his self-proclaimed warped, dark and bipolar art, and thriving in an exclusive community hell-bent on chewing up and spitting out artists with every gallery event. "I'm like, 'Hell yes, time to kick ass and put my name out there!' I wanna go all the way, man."

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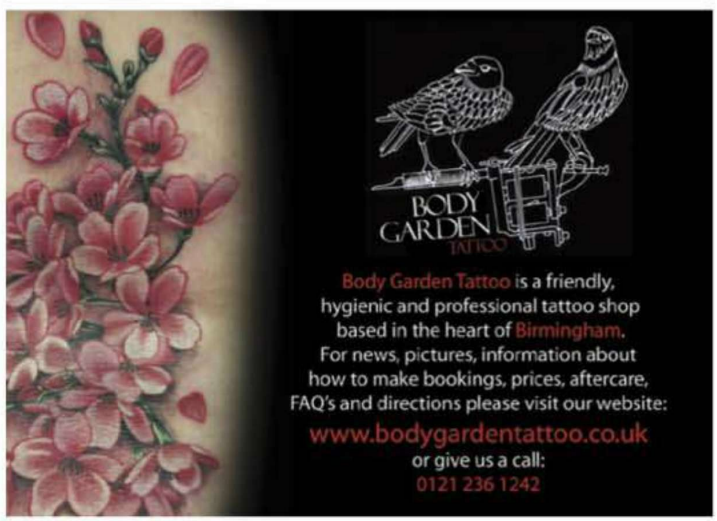
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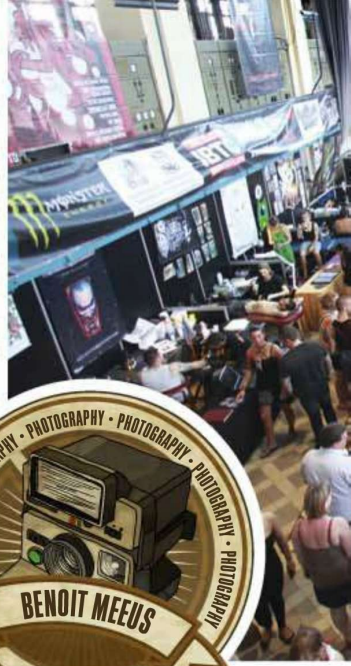
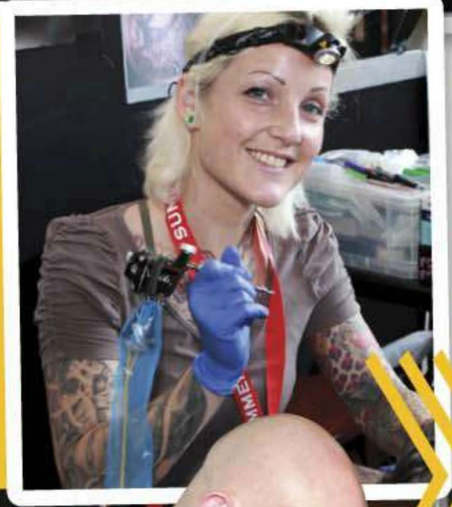
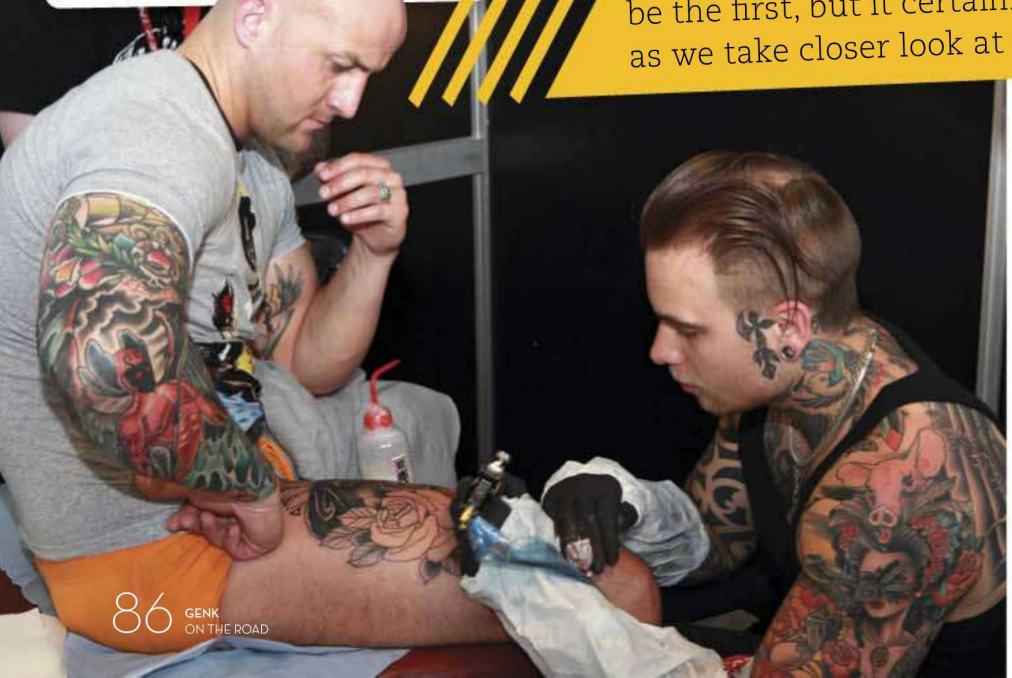






SCENES FROM THE

SUMMER INKFEST GENK, BELGIUM

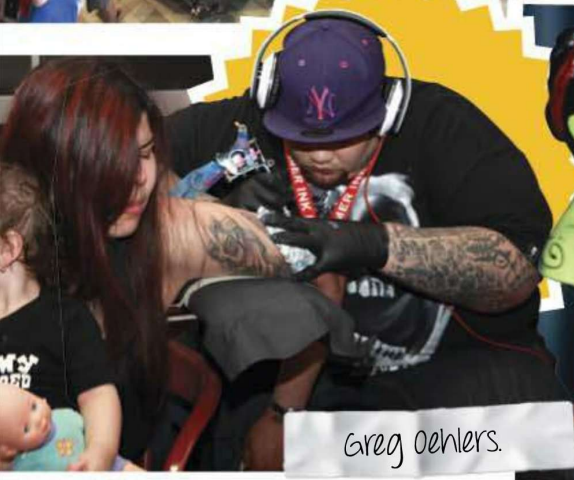
Rik Van Boeckel.

MAY 2012 26

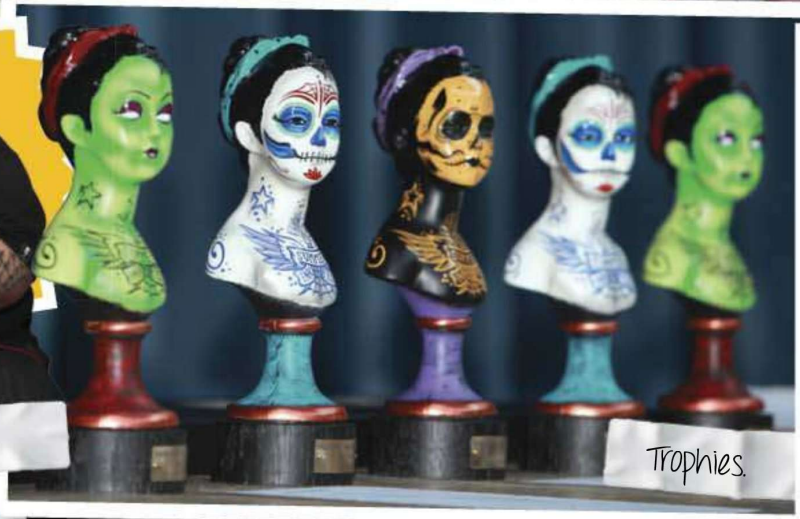
MAY 2012 27

The first Summer Inkfest in Genk in the eastern part of Belgium took place in an historical mine building called C-Mine. It may be the first, but it certainly won't be the last as we take closer look at this great weekend

SUNDAY WINNERS



Greg Oehlers.

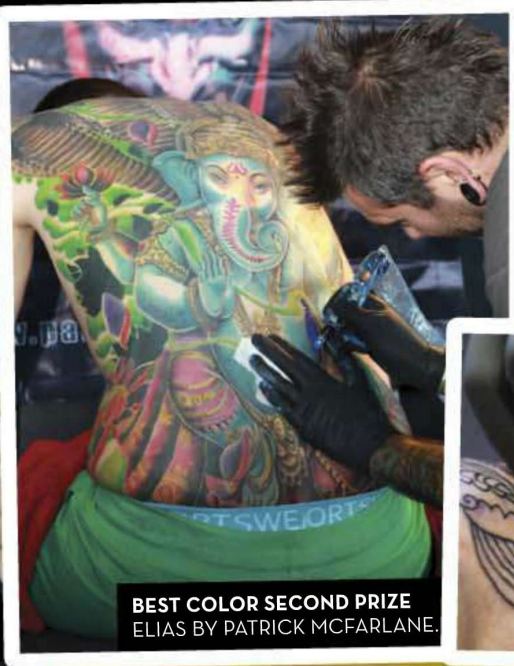


Trophies.

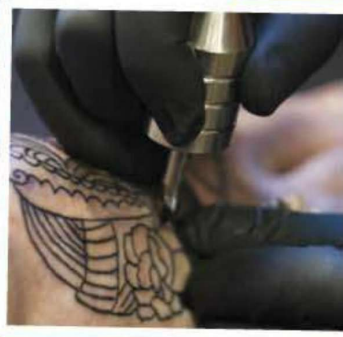
"I AM NEW IN THE TATTOO SCENE, BUT PEOPLE ALREADY KNOW ME FROM THAT. I TRAVEL A LOT ALONG CONVENTIONS IN EUROPE AND ASIA. NEXT YEAR I WILL ORGANISE NEXT TO BRUSSELS AND GENK, A NEW BELGIAN CONVENTION IN GENK, THAT WILL BE IN MARCH"
KIM – SUMMERINKFEST MANAGER

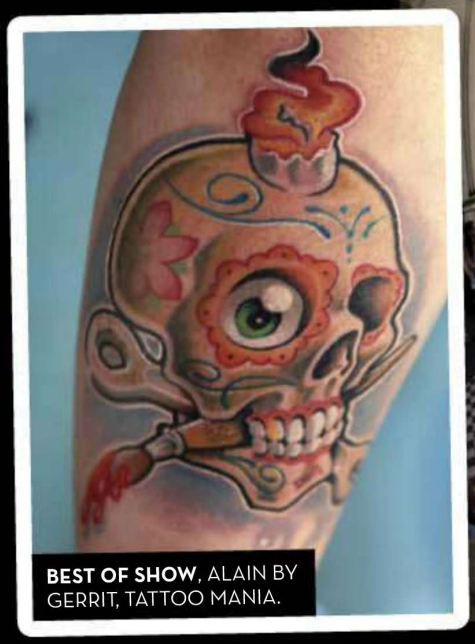
Kim wants to give new Belgian talent a chance like Pip and Tommy, local artists from Genk and Black Bird Tattoo; and Polak, a young artist of Harai Tattoo (Gent). The female Belgian artist Mpatshi tattoos sketchy designs and Frank from nearby Houthale tattooed an American car at the arm of fireman Kurt. Besides the Belgian artists there are many Dutch artists working in Genk like the Needle Art crew and Lyz and Gerrit of Tattoo Mania, Apeldoorn. Gerrit wins Saturday the Best of Day with a colourful skull at the leg of Alain from Brussels. "It's a skull with a brush and an open end spanner," he explains to me. "This has to do with my passion. I like to repair and to paint motorbikes. And I produce decorative objects like the little sculptures of women for the price-winners of the contests." On Sunday Gerrit and Alain also winsthe Best of Show.

BEST COLOR BY PETJA, ARTCORE, BULGARIA.



BEST COLOR SECOND PRIZE
ELIAS BY PATRICK MCFARLANE.





BEST OF SHOW, ALAIN BY GERRIT, TATTOO MANIA.

SUMMER INKFEST GENK, BELGIUM

BEST OLD SCHOOL, JORDAN BY BASIA.

EASTERN EUROPE

There are also two female Polish artists, both now tattooing in Amsterdam. Basia, who works in the booth of Amsterdam Tattooing, wins Best Old School on Sunday. Meanwhile, Emilia tattoos in Amsterdam at House of Tattoos. On her leg she wears a tattoo of a flying deer, tattooed by the Romanian/ Hungarian artist Icon (Tattoo Centre Alkmaar). Her left arm is tattooed by Claudia of Classic Ink & Mods, Amsterdam.

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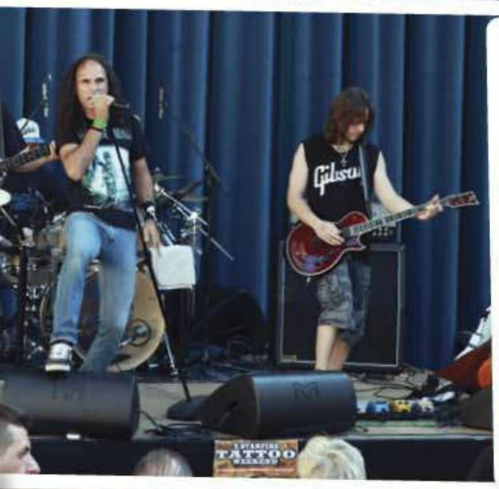
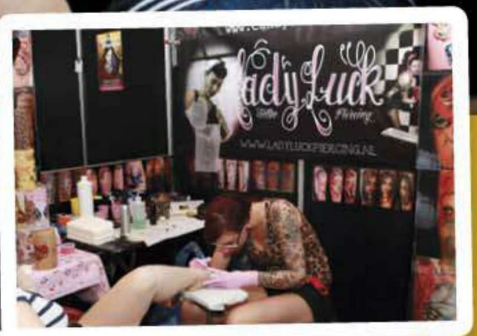
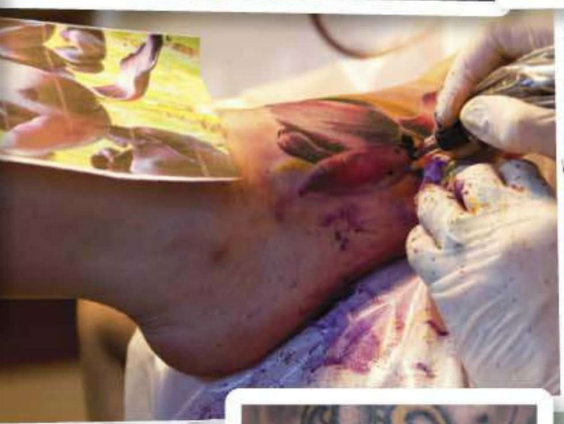
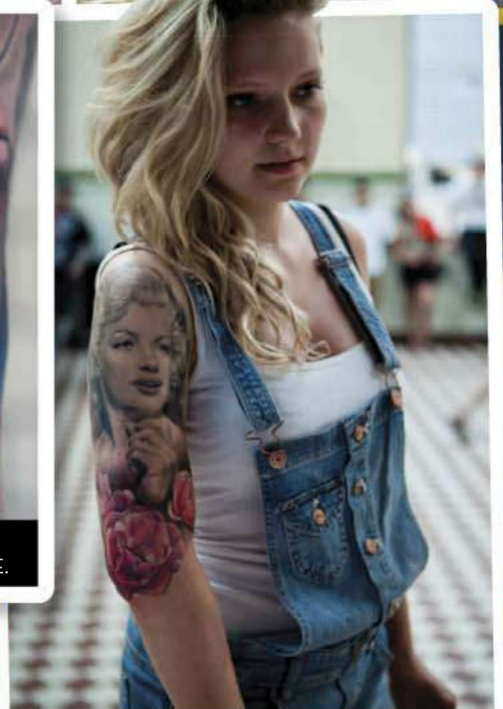






BEST OF SUNDAY, SVEN BY PATRICK MC FARLANE.



LADY LUCK
Two female artists from Weert, Limburg, are working in Genk: Candy Cane and Lady Luck. Lady Luck is tattooed on her left arm in an old school style by Han of King of Kings, Swalmen. "What I like about old school is the use of colours and the clear images. Some tattoos are connected with my family. On my elbow you see a heart with safety pins, that's my creative heart." Also from the Netherlands is Sjanett who is tattooed by Jo Harrison: "It's a collection of paintings of Alphonse Mucha. It's about music, poetry and precious stones. The hair of the woman is characteristic for the women who's portrait he painted. The flowers are derived from different precious stones."

NIKI NORBERG

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At first Niki Norberg didn't even want to be a tattooist as he was convinced that his clientele would only consist of "metalheads, whores and criminals". But he's now worked at Heidi Hay's studio for four years, during which time he's been involved in a lengthy litigation process against the IRS in order to be able to sell his paintings

Simon Lundh

IT TOOK A LONG TIME BEFORE NIKI WAS CONVINCED TATTOOING WOULD BE A SUITABLE FUTURE PROFESSION. DESPITE HIS FRIENDS' EFFORTS DURING THE '90S, HE DIDN'T GET STARTED UNTIL 2001.

I didn't even consider tattooing. I didn't want to work where there would be blood, and what type of clientele would I get? Would it be only metalheads, whores and criminals? And was I to work from home? This was in the early '90s, so there was like, two studios in Gothenburg – I had no intention of being an apprentice. My friends wanted me to tattoo them. They offered to buy the equipment and act as guinea pigs, but I continued my painting and attended a school for comic art. I had other jobs, so my painting was only a side gig, but I put much time into it.

THE TURNING POINT CAME WHEN HE GOT TO KNOW A GUY WITH DECENT INSIGHT IN THE BUSINESS. MUCH TO THE JOY OF HIS FRIENDS.

The thing was that I painted a lot of realism and that's what I wanted to tattoo as well, but I had never seen a tattoo that reached the level at which I was painting. At the same time, I wanted to make money as an artist and in order to do that you need to tattoo. Then I came across Paul Booth's work, and suddenly I saw something I too wanted to create. Not that I necessarily like his style, but his shading and how he uses the grey scale opened up a whole new world for me. I became more curious and more ready. The first five years, however, I did mostly stars, text and tribal, but I don't mind it taking five or six years if I want to reach a certain level and I know where I'm going. I have to come up with the idea myself and be comfortable with it. Otherwise it's not a good idea, especially when you'll be marking people for life.

THIS HUMAN QUALITY OF HIS UNVEILED ITSELF WHEN HE WAS OFFERED A JOB AT HEIDI HAY'S.
I sent her some pictures, mostly to get some feedback from someone skilful in the business. She asked me instantly when I could start. Three months after I submitted the pictures we had a meeting, and three months after that I tried out working in her studio for a month. After that I took two weeks vacation to evaluate the situation, but it actually felt right from day one.

> MY FRIENDS WANTED ME TO TATTOO THEM. THEY OFFERED TO BUY THE EQUIPMENT AND ACT AS GUINEA PIGS

NIKI HAS WORKED IN THE STUDIO SINCE 2007. ALMOST AS LONG AS HE'S BEEN INVOLVED IN A LITIGATION PROCESS WITH THE LOCAL IRS IN SWEDEN, WHO ARE OF THE OPINION THAT HE SHOULDN'T BE ABLE TO SELL HIS PAINTINGS, HIM BEING A TATTOOIST AND ALL.
They say the paintings I do are merely a tool used in my profession as a tattoo artist and that the actual tattoo is the finished product. It doesn't matter if the customer only wants the painting and not a tattoo. The purpose, according to them, is tattooing and not art. They won't consider the fact that I purposely focus on a group of people with purchasing power, like tattooed people. And they decide what's art without following our government's official study on art; it's a matter of interpretation of course, but tattooing fulfils every requirement. The IRS even go above the Swedish Academy of Literature, who in their encyclopaedia explain what a tattoo means. The IRS is acting as if they are their own dictatorship. The customer can hang up the painting, burn it in the street or whatever; as long as I sit at Heidi Hay's, according to them I'm a tattoo artist. I know colleagues who are allowed to sell art or illustrations for a certain percentage of their income, but all the employees at my local IRS are of a different opinion. I'm on my eighth officer now.

WHAT HE'S DOING MIGHT NOT BE ART IN THE EYES OF THE IRS, BUT IT IS THE EYES OF HIS CUSTOMERS AND COLLEAGUES, ESPECIALLY WITHIN REALISM. ON HIS WEBSITE, ALL HIS PICTURES ARE IN THIS GENRE.
With the pictures I put up there, I want to show what I want and prefer to tattoo, but I've tried all styles. If someone's been waiting for a year to get an Asian tattoo, I will give them that. I also have a couple of customers who only want old school.

CONSIDERING NIKI'S BACKGROUND THOUGH, HE'S NEVER TATTOOED IN A COMIC BOOK STYLE.
That was never my goal, going to that school. Instead, I learned how to build up and visualize a story, to construct emotions in images, and that has been very useful in my tattooing.

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All details correct at time of going to press. Adverts cannot be taken over the phone. Please include your full studio details even if they are not to accompany the wording.

Inkarma Southport are looking for a talented, dedicated tattoo artist to join them on a full-time basis. Will consider part-time also. Studio experience is essential. A strong portfolio and excellent work ethic is a must. References will be required. Short term relocation help is available. If interested please email relevant information and images of your work to: *inkarma@hotmail.co.uk*.

Experienced British tattooist wanted for a new studio in Feltam, Middlesex to be opened in August. A minimum of three years studio experience is a must with references and a good portfolio. Must be clean, trustworthy, honest, reliable and versatile in all styles. The right candidate will help with the day to day running of the studio and oversee an apprentice. If you think you are the right person to fill this position please send me an email with a portfolio to *gman1979@hotmail.co.uk*. PLEASE NOTE: this is not an apprentice position.

Experienced body piercer wanted for Woolwich studio. Requires at least three years shop experience with a positive attitude, no prima donnas please as you will be expected to share reception and general studio duties. Call Al on 07967 185207 or email *amustafa@btopenworld.com*.

Costa Blanca, Spain: tattoo, piercing and nail studio for sale, located in the centre of the village. 300m walking to the beach – 7km to Benidorm. The Studio has all year trade and is well known. Inside there are three separate cabins (two tattoo, one piercing) and a seperate sterilisation cabin. Also, a seperate nail studio inside. Big public room with reception desk and thousands of designs. Computer with biggest flash-catalog, copy machine. It's all-year traded, very modern, clean, sterile and fully licensed. Lease terms five years renewable, very cheap rent. Leasehold €42,000. Call 0034 649 214 426 for more info.

Female/male tattoo artist wanted to work in a new studio at Neston on the Wirral. Would be self-employed, min three years studio experience. Able to do custom work and flash. Interested, please ring Jason on 07545 534781.

Steel beauty tattoo studio in Ilford, Essex, is looking for an experienced tattoo artist to join the team. Please contact Sean or Gemma on 02085 180807 to arrange a interview or for any more information you may need.

Tattoo artist wanted: busy Wolverhampton tattoo studio is requiring a new artist for immediate start. Applicant must have a minimum of three years in-studio experience and portfolio will be required. Artist must be a clean, talented, hard-working professional with no 'rock star' syndrome and must be able to undertake custom work. Must be able to undertake a variety of styles, small and large. If you think you match the criteria please get in touch: *newromanticink@hotmail.co.uk* (title 'job' and send any links to your work) or 07956 079025.

A position has become available for a full-time tattooist at our award-winning shop in Chertsey. Only serious experienced people need apply. Please contact Jules on 07904 609575 or *richards611@btinternet.com*.

I have a vacancy for a full time Tattooist at Tattoo Art, Bury St Edmunds www.tattooart.org. The studio has been established in Bury St Edmunds for the last 20 years. This is a busy studio with a good reputation and good client base. Experienced Tattooist preferred, but would be willing to help someone along if appropriate. Contact chris@tattooart.org or 07949 240197

TATTOO ARTIST WANTED Skins and Needles in Middlesbrough are looking for a new artist to join our busy, friendly studio. Applicant must have a strong portfolio and be free from attitude problems. Our studio has a lot to offer the right applicant *facebook.com/skinsandneedles* email *thesalvins@live.com*.

An eye is upon you

THE BIG SOCIETY

When I was little, I lived in a little house, in a little village, a few hundred yards from my Grandma's (also little) house. My whole world was small...

Paula Hardy Kangelos

I attended a local school with less than a hundred other children and my mum was one of the dinner ladies. My aunts, uncles and cousins all lived nearby and everyone in the village not only knew each other, they also appeared to like one another as well. In the church, pub and tiny shop, greetings were exchanged and good feelings were made in the same the way bees make honey. Bound together with geographical proximity and collective good will, we were a community.

I'm not sure that communities like this still exist, perhaps now the 'bees' exit the hive in search of pollen, but are afraid to share it upon return. Instead, we sit in our overpriced, box-like homes and worry about the volume, texture, and taste of our metaphorical nectar; we compare ourselves to others and imagine that we fall short. It's not our fault of course; relentless advertising reminds us of our worthlessness and convinces us to exchange our honey for their new wondrous product so that we may once again be happy. The way we were before we left our villages and their traditional commonality behind.

Fortunately, humans have found a new way to fulfill their needs for connection and reciprocity. Rather than forming polite fraternities of chance with our neighbours, we've devised methodologies for finding those we suspect we will be comfortable beside – religion, sports, hobbies. Britain is no longer inhabited by Northerners and Southerners, the Welsh and the Scottish; instead we are Trekkies, football supporters, knitters, and vegans. We've become passionate about our passions and have formed new communities around them in order to replace what we've lost, a sense of belonging and solidarity.

Tattoo enthusiasts are no different to any other devoted niche group – friendships, careers, finances and travel plans are all viewed through tattoo-tinted spectacles. Our love of ink seems to mean so much more to us than a mere hobby – like a ripple in the water, a seemingly simple aesthetic preference sets off a reaction that becomes ever larger. It's not just a lifestyle for many of us, it's a whole life, a life we are incredibly happy to share with like-minded others.

> A SENSE OF COMPETITION PROMOTES COHESION THROUGH CAMARADERIE AND COMMON AIM, MUCH LIKE A MINIATURE OLYMPIC GAMES, ONLY WITH A LOT MORE HOMEMADE JAM

Of course, not everyone thinks of tattooland as a community. These days you're just as likely to hear it referred to as an industry, an apparently offensive concept to some – but are these differing descriptions completely incompatible? Is industry a dirty word or can the commercialism of tattoos be seen as a positive thing?

Like it or not, tattooing, like other arts, is a business. Yes, many artists would continue to sculpt, paint or tattoo without the possibility of financial reward, but patronage undoubtably plays a part in both the conception and execution of many artworks. Artistic endeavour, great skill and talent are rightly valued, and although it may be crass, value in western society is most often defined in monetary terms.

This exchange of monies for services (tattooing) or items (tattoos) is industry at its most simple, but it needn't be an affront – industry obliges professionalism – enterprise, diligence, industriousness, just as surely as it obliges restitution, and how can professionalism ever be negative? Is the community/industry divide purely arbitrary anyway? Devotion and diligence are not far apart and neither are engagement and enterprise. My little village was always at its best when there was something to gain, be that a prize for the best-kept hanging baskets, the pride associated with domino domination, or simply talc from the fête tombola. A sense of competition promotes cohesion through camaraderie and common aim, much like a miniature Olympic games, only with a lot more homemade jam. And the tattoo industry also benefits from competition, the more artists, shops, magazine titles and shows there are, the better each one has to be.

The tattoo world, either by luck or careful design, is blessed with a space for its own giant vegetable competitions – a place where community and industry are joined in perfect marriage, the tattoo convention. Equal parts trade show and social gathering, conventions combine business and brotherhood seamlessly, largely due to the genuine friendship that exists between artists, organisers, customers and enthusiasts, but also due to competitive spirit and common aim of improving both the art form and its related associated industry.

Great art, a devoted community, a responsible industry, and a profit? Yes, we can have it all, whatever you'd like to call it.

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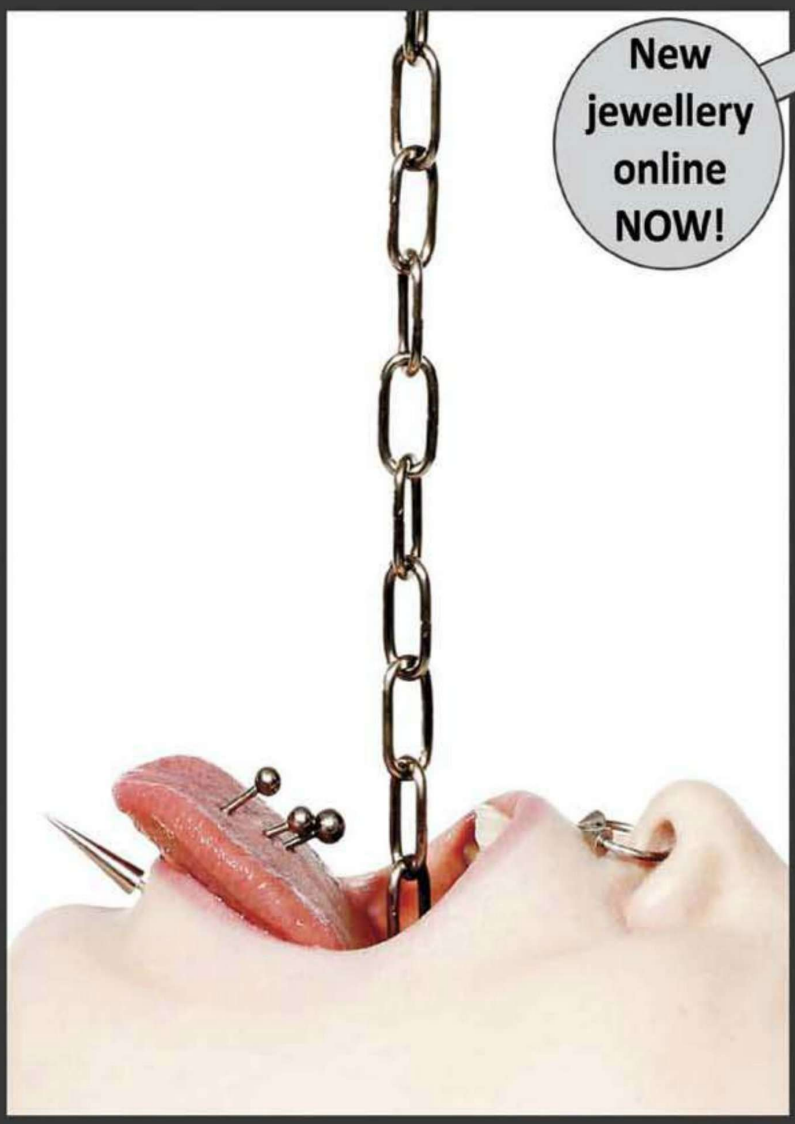

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